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COUNTRYFILE

ISSUE 166 | **JULY 2020** | £4.75

Summer wildlife

Your guide to the UK's most sensational spectacles, with...

- Butterflies
- **Pine martens**
- Sparrowhawks
- **Red squirrels**
- Grey seals

+ more!

Puffin island

Jewel of the Hebrides

GROW YOUR OWN

Garden paradise

50 flowers to attract amazing wildlife

WILD TUNES

The greatest music inspired by the countryside



BEAUTIFUL BROADS

Wonders on the water

DOORSTEP DISCOVERIES

Finding nature in lockdown

BY APPOINTMENT TO
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
SWAROVSKI OPTIK
SUPPLIER OF BINOCULARS

CL COMPANION

THE FREEDOM *TO EXPERIENCE MORE*

SEE *THE* UNSEEN

SWAROVSKI OPTIK



Finding a curlew was a huge surprise for editor Fergus. See more doorstep discoveries on page 62

Local heroes



Back in March, I planned to go for a walk with a local friend to record the eerie and enchanting bubbling calls and songs of nesting curlews on a farm in the nearby Black Mountains for a podcast. But the Covid-19 lockdown put paid to that. No chance of seeing or hearing these rare birds in 2020.

Or so I thought. Forced to wander the local footpaths and lanes rather than escape to more glamorous spring locations, I began to notice all manner of curious things – wildlife I didn't know existed here, fascinating historic sites and hidden corners of beauty. And I heard a curlew just 10 minutes' walk from my house. I couldn't believe it – a pair was nesting in the uniform pastures near the river. What a discovery.

I'm sure all of us have made discoveries in our local areas as we have followed the Government's instructions not to drive and instead walked or cycled to enjoy whatever scraps of countryside we can find. It has been tough but there have been golden moments and we at *BBC Countryfile Magazine* would like to share some more of our own discoveries – see page 62.

At the time of writing, it is unclear how the summer will unfurl and whether we can explore further afield. But remember, the countryside will be there waiting for us when this crisis is finally behind us.

Escape to the country with our podcasts; visit **iTunes** or **countryfile.com/podcast**

Fergus Collins, editor@countryfile.com

HOW TO CONTACT US

To subscribe or for subs enquiries:
Domestic telephone: 03330 162112
Overseas telephone: 01604 973720
Email: bbccountryfile@buysubscriptions.com
Post: *BBC Countryfile Magazine*, PO BOX 3320, 3 Queensbridge, The Lakes, Northampton NN4 7BF

To talk to the editorial team:
Telephone: 0117 300 8580
Email: editor@countryfile.com
Post: *BBC Countryfile Magazine*, Eagle House, Colston Avenue, Bristol BS1 4ST
Advertising enquiries:
0117 300 8815
App support:
http://apps.immediate.co.uk/support
Syndication and licensing enquiries (UK and international):
richard.bentley@immediate.co.uk
+44 (0)207 150 5168

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Matt Gaw, page 22
"With 120 miles of navigable water, the Broads is the UK's wild Venice: a waterscape of wonder and wandering, pulling in seven million people a year."



Kathryn Ferry, page 52
"Fitted with bedrooms, living space and a kitchen, the standard camping coach slept six for a weekly charge of £2 10s."



Dave Goulson, page 36
"Our gardens could become a network of tiny nature reserves, supporting biodiversity, storing carbon in the soil and trees, providing home-grown food."

Photos Oliver Edwards, RSPB Images

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Discover the wondrous wild wetlands of the Norfolk Broads

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An Atlantic puffin in breeding plumage at Skomer Island National Nature Reserve, Pembrokeshire.

Cover: Alamy. Photos: Getty, Alamy,

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and save with our special offer, page 34





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JULY
IN THE COUNTRY

PICTURES › WILDLIFE › PEOPLE & PLACES › COUNTRY KNOW-HOW › FOOD



Photo: Alamy



REFLECTIONS IN RED

A glowing sun lowers over a field of poppies near Brighton in Sussex. These ebullient blooms spring into action from June to August and tend to cultivate fallow fields and disturbed ground, seen to heartrending effect after the First World War. Although artificial poppies flourish as a symbol of Rememberance, the delicate wildflowers are in decline due to intensive agriculture practices. Increasingly, their cheerful yet poignant beauty is confined to road verges, scrub and waste ground.

RIVER VIEW

Often overlooked in favour of its famous neighbour, the Dove, the River Manifold is no less charming as it winds its way through the limestone crags of the Peak District. It creates a particularly pretty scene as it flows under St Bertram's Bridge, a beautiful single-span stone crossing of medieval origin, before joining the Dove at Ilam.



GOLDEN CEILING

Soon to star in the latest film adaptation of *The Secret Garden*, the Laburnum Arch in Bodnant Garden, Conwy is a magical walkway of golden petals. Created in 1880, the 55-metre arch is the longest and oldest of its kind in Britain. Usually in flower from late May to mid-June, it bloomed earlier than ever this year, on 15 May.



WASPISH CHARM

One of six variants of bee orchid, the wasp orchid distinguishes itself by producing flowers that resemble wasps, in a bid to attract the stripy pollinators to its petals. This rare plant is scarce across Britain but grows in a few places in the West Country. Here it stands tall on Cleeve Hill near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

Photos PA, Naturepl.com,, Alamy

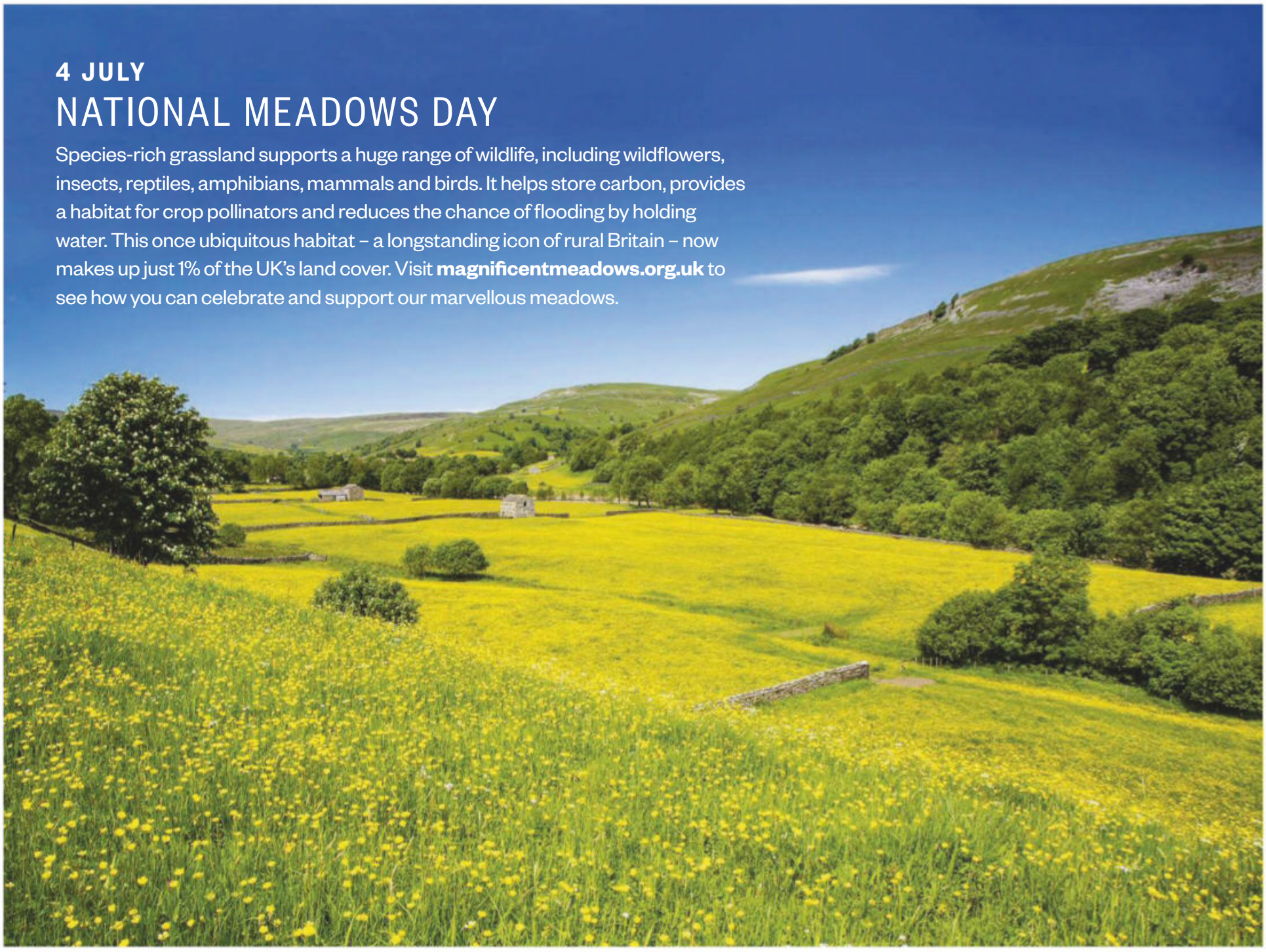
DUSK MEETINGS

The long light evenings of summer mean that our diurnal lives overlap with those of the crepuscular or twilight world, such as bats and barn owls. Hunting for voles and mice over rough meadows, the adult owls have to work hard to feed growing broods of up to five hungry and demanding owlets. If you spot one hunting, stay still and it may fly close, so intent is it on scouring the ground for prey. Our summer podcast from Martin Down in Hampshire last year includes one such encounter; you can listen here: **aca.st/d63680**

4 JULY

NATIONAL MEADOWS DAY

Species-rich grassland supports a huge range of wildlife, including wildflowers, insects, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds. It helps store carbon, provides a habitat for crop pollinators and reduces the chance of flooding by holding water. This once ubiquitous habitat – a longstanding icon of rural Britain – now makes up just 1% of the UK's land cover. Visit **magnificentmeadows.org.uk** to see how you can celebrate and support our marvellous meadows.





Podcast of the month

CURIOUS UNDER THE STARS

Follow the lives of pub landlords Gareth and Diane in a magical comedy drama set in the mysterious village of Glan Don on the wild Welsh coast. All 10 series of the show are available on *BBC Sounds*, so tune in, sit back and enjoy the adventure.

bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b0s228



IN THE GARDEN

Six tips for wise watering this summer

1. Water your garden early in the morning or in the evening to avoid unnecessary evaporation.

2. Where possible, use a watering can rather than sprinklers or a hose to avoid wasting water.

3. Focus your watering directly beneath your plants, shrubs and trees, avoiding use on bare ground.

4. Add organic matter, such as compost, to your garden to improve the water-holding capacity of your soil.

5. Harness water straight from the sky by installing a water butt.

6. Remove weeds – these consume water, leaving less moisture in the soil for the rest of your plants.

Photos Getty, Alamy

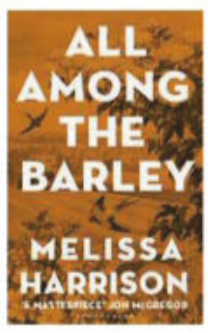
FROM THE BOOKSHELF:
MODERN NOVELS

Four contemporary tales that evoke the countryside



THE HARVEST
by Christopher Hart

A raw and beautiful portrayal of a young man at the impoverished edge of rural society, set in the byways and poachers' haunts of Dorset.



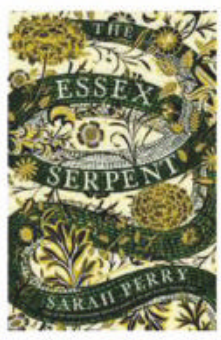
ALL AMONG THE BARLEY
by Melissa Harrison

Set in rural England in the 1930s, this novel explores the intricacies and hardships of country life, class and patriarchy.



A BLACK FOX RUNNING
by Brian Carter

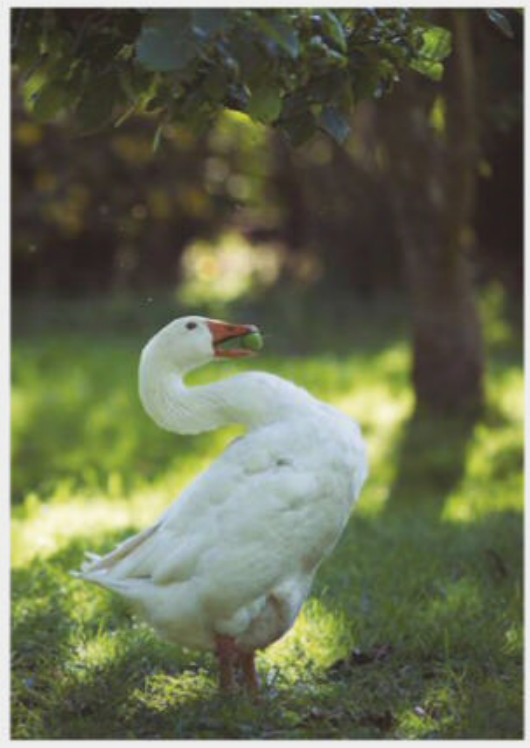
The story of Wulfgar, the Dartmoor fox, and his battle to survive against the trapper Scoble in Devon's wild moors and hidden valleys.



THE ESSEX SERPENT
by Sarah Perry

Science and religion clash when widow Cora meets vicar Will on an Essex coast stalked by rumours of the return of a sea monster.







THE SEASONAL TABLE: **A TASTE OF JULY**

Join Kathy Bishop and Tom Crowford on their West Country smallholding

Feathers blanket the orchard. Our geese are mid-moult and feeling sorry for themselves. Luckily, summer fruits provide a cheerful distraction. Early plums and crimson cherries, plus dusky blackcurrants, pink raspberries and plump strawberries from the fruit cage. The tubby gaggle gathers around our boots as we pick, ready to catch any falling fruit. They also waddle over to the gooseberry patch to scrump the aptly named berries. We turn what is left into one of our favourite summer drinks.

GOOSEBERRY SODA

INGREDIENTS

Makes approximately 750ml

350g very ripe, green gooseberries
2½ tbsp honey
450ml soda water or sparkling mineral water
Ice, to serve (optional)

METHOD

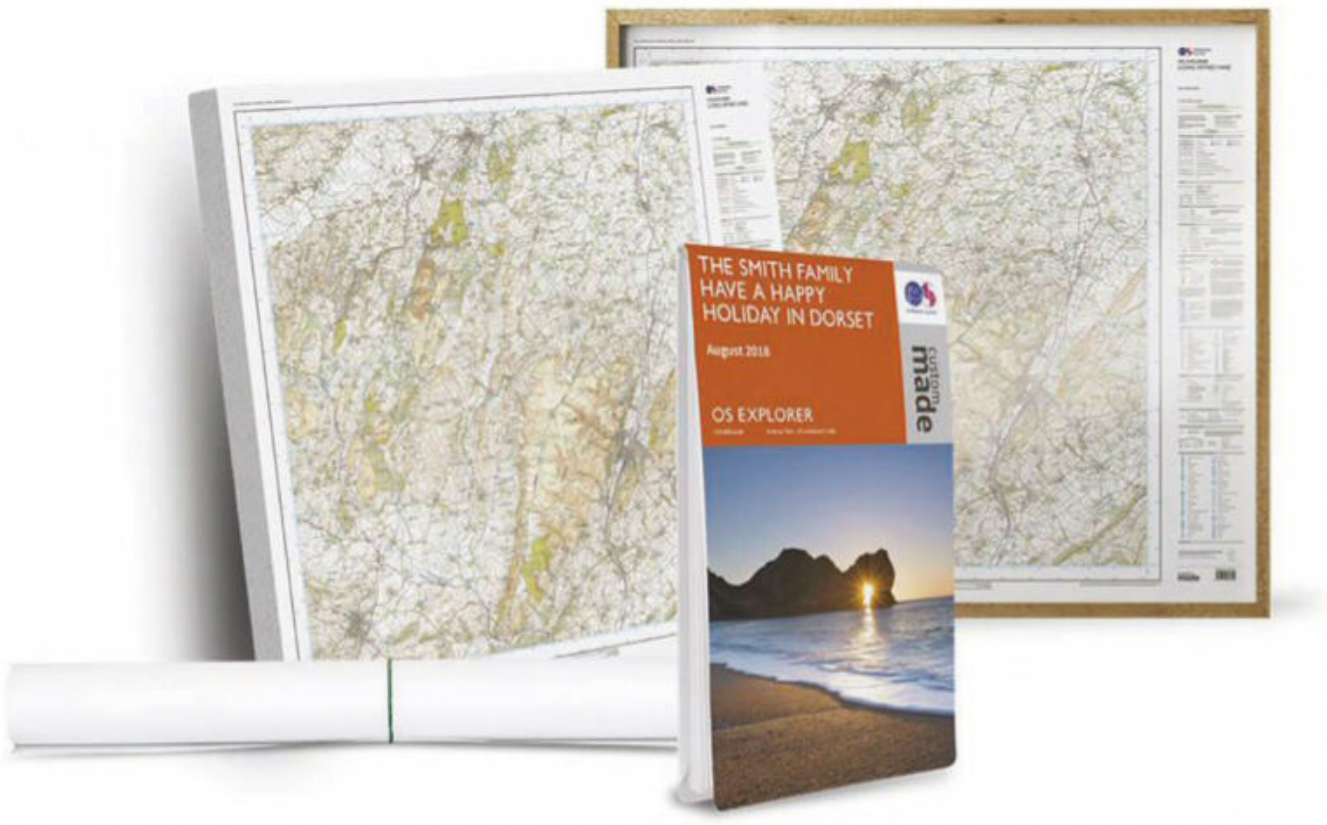
1. Put the gooseberries in a blender with a splash of water to help loosen them up a bit, and pulse into a thick purée.

2. Using a large spoon, push the purée through a wire-mesh sieve suspended over a large jug to extract the bright-green juice. Once as much juice has been extracted as possible, discard the pips and tough skins that have been left behind. You should end up with around 300ml juice (if you have much less than that, then just put a smaller amount of the soda water in at the end so that the flavour doesn't get diluted too much).

3. Add the honey to the juice and stir until dissolved. You can add a little more or reduce the amount to taste if you like; the riper your gooseberries are, the less you'll need. Top with the soda water and gently stir to combine.

4. Pour the soda into a sterilised bottle, seal and pop in the fridge to chill. Serve cold, over plenty of ice. It will keep happily in the fridge for a couple of days, but may need a gentle shake before serving if it has settled in the bottle.

Discover more recipe ideas from Kathy and Tom on Instagram **instagram.com/the_seasonal_table** and their website **theseasonaltable.co.uk**



WISE BUY: CUSTOM-MADE MAPS WITH OS

Would you like to discover more in your local area or favourite holiday destination? Or maybe you are on the hunt for the perfect gift for an adventure-loving family member or friend? Ordnance Survey's custom-made maps place you in the heart of the landscape. Choose your centre point – be it a home, a favourite mountain or a beloved beach – and customise the front cover with your own photograph and title. Pick from two scales: 1:50,000 for a large overview of your chosen area, or 1:25,000 for a more detailed map, improving your chances of discovering hidden footpaths, lost brooks and historic remains. Both folded and flat maps are available, or, for something a bit more special, why not create a framed, canvas map to display on your wall? From £16.99. **ordnancesurvey.co.uk**



Red spider mites...

DO THEY REALLY SUCK BLOOD?

You may have seen these tiny mites wandering among your garden plants. It is no surprise, given their fluorescent crimson tone and busy nature, that they earned the nickname 'blood suckers' – a misnomer, as they feast on plants, not animals. The mites can cause mottled leaves and early leaf loss on garden plants.

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time."

John Lubbock
The Use Of Life

HOW TO USE...

KITCHEN SCRAPS

Four waste-saving ideas to make your home more eco-friendly



Potato-skin crisps Fry peelings in a pan with oil or butter until golden brown. Season with salt and pepper and serve with your favourite sauce.



Tea-leaf fertiliser Cut open your used teabags and pour the nitrogen-rich leaves around the base of acid-loving plants.



Vegetable stock Throw leftover vegetable scraps into a pan, cover with water and cook for 30 minutes. Drain, keeping the liquid as stock.



Dry chilli seeds Remove mature seeds, put on a plate for a few days to dry, then store in a cool, dark place, ready to plant the following year.

Photos Getty, Alamy Illustrat on Enya Todd

WILDLIFE CHECKLIST: **SUMMER GARDEN INSECTS**

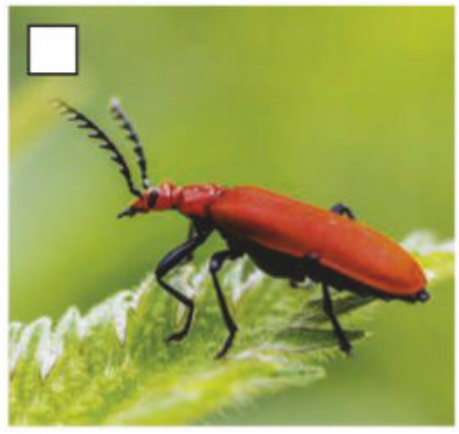
Spend an hour or two in the garden looking under logs and stones, or just watching the flowers. How many of these can you spot?



SEVEN-SPOT LADYBIRD
Common in gardens, with seven black spots on a red wing case.



DEVIL'S COACH HORSE
A large, long beetle with huge jaws. Rears its abdomen if threatened.



RED-HEADED CARDINAL BEETLE
Stunning scarlet insect that hides in flowerheads to catch visiting flies.



SMALL COPPER BUTTERFLY
Tiny and fast-flying with bright metallic orange upper wings.



BLACK GARDEN ANT
Wingless, 3–5mm long, black/dark brown – THE ant of patios.



COMMON FIELD GRASSHOPPER
Males 'sing' for females by rubbing their legs against their wings.



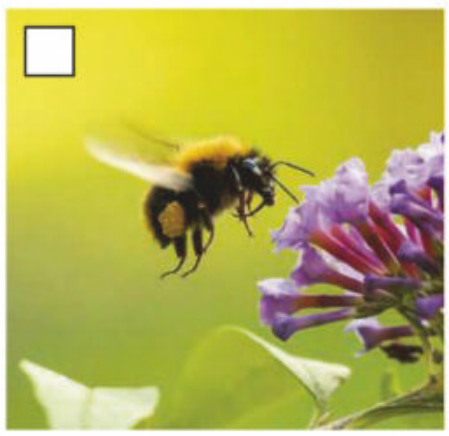
SMALL TORTOISESHELL
Handsome and still common; feeds on nectar-rich flowers like buddleia.



COMMON BLUE DAMSELFLY
Electric-blue and dances in the air around the pond margins.



SOUTHERN HAWKER DRAGONFLY
Large, fast and inquisitive; male has lime green spots along a black body.



COMMON CARDER BEE
A fluffy, gingery bumblebee often seen in gardens, woods and heaths.



COMMON WASP
Bright yellow with black bands, it builds a large nest in house cavities.



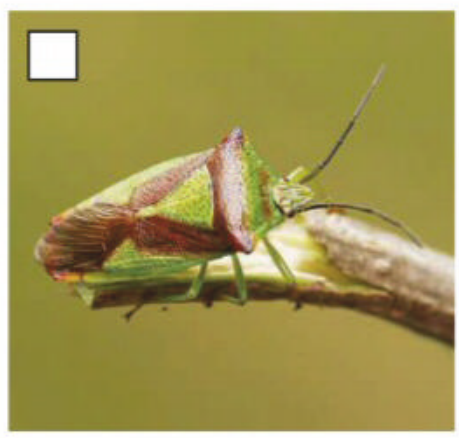
GARDEN BUMBLEBEE
Look out for the striped yellow and black thorax with a pure-white tail.



RED-TAILED BUMBLEBEE
A social bee, feeding from spring to autumn, with an orange-red tail.



LESSER STAG BEETLE
A big widespread beetle but lacks the 'antlers' of its larger cousin.



HAWTHORN SHIELDBUG
Usually bright green, this large bug predominatly feeds on haws.



WASP BEETLE
This harmless narrow-bodied longhorn beetle feeds on flowers.

On the farm with

Adam Henson

IS GROWING BIOFUELS A WASTE OF LAND?



One unexpected legacy of the pandemic has been the benefit to the environment. Travel bans, lockdown restrictions and factory closures saw wildlife thrive, carbon emissions fall and improvements to air and water quality. And for what seemed like the first time in years, biofuels were discussed in the pages of the national papers.

Biofuels are a potential replacement for the fossil fuels we came to rely on throughout the 20th century – mainly petrol and diesel. They are made from living, non-food crops that absorb carbon dioxide as they grow so that burning them doesn't add to the warming gases that have become such a global headache. Biodiesel is an alternative to conventional diesel that can be made from oilseed rape, while bioethanol is a replacement for petrol that is produced mainly from cereals, which, in the UK, means wheat.

CONTROVERSIAL CROPS

But are these biofuels as green as we once thought? Arguments have raged over just how ethical, environmentally friendly and cost-effective biofuels really are. Critics are concerned that energy crops are grown on land that could be used for food production and that processing or using biofuel can cause more carbon dioxide than burning fossil fuels. Others worry about possible overuse of fertilisers during cultivation, while international campaigners have condemned the destruction of rainforests to create new palm oil plantations. The debate has been divisive, with some environmentalists referring to 'good' and 'bad' biofuels.



Used in the production of biodiesel, oilseed rape is widely grown by farmers as a biofuel crop

I've always taken my obligation as a responsible, environmentally aware farmer seriously. We have grown oilseed rape on our mixed arable and livestock farm in the Cotswolds for as long as I can remember. Over the years, our rapeseed has been used for biofuel, margarine manufacture and it has been cold-pressed to create a British alternative to imported olive oil. Oilseed rape has worked well for us as a break crop but it is increasingly difficult to grow, due to flea beetle that love to eat it and are difficult to control.

POLITICAL PROMISES

Energy crops are a political issue as well as an agricultural one. About 15 years ago, the UK Government set a target to source 10% of our transport fuel from plants by 2020. This promise was made long before Whitehall's legally binding commitment to net-zero emissions. The past few years have seen the argument in favour of biofuels over petrol and diesel overshadowed by the rise of electric vehicles. I suspect that to most drivers today, a 'greener' car means one that needs charging overnight.

But perhaps things are about to change. Research has gone into producing biofuels from algae and bacteria, and earlier in the year the Government announced funding for new British biofuel plants. Millions of pounds in public money are being invested in four new sites that will convert farm waste, household waste and wood waste into fuel. The Department of Transport said there was emphasis on providing green fuel for the heaviest vehicles on our roads, while more research was going into low-carbon aviation fuel. So commitment to biofuels hasn't gone away. As environmental issues rise up the agenda, expect to hear a lot more about 'green' fuels in the future.

***Ask Adam:* What topic would you like to know more about?** Email your suggestions to **editor@countryfile.com**

Photos: Sean Malyon, Alamy



PERFECT COMPANIONS

If your dog means the world to you, it's not too late to tell us all about them for the chance to win great prizes!

While life may feel a little different at the moment, one thing that never changes is the amount of undivided love and affection our dogs give us day after day. Even when we're having to exercise more caution on our daily walks, the sight of our four-legged friends scampering around and enjoying themselves is incredibly uplifting and makes it all worth it.

So it's no surprise the Great British Dogs website, sponsored by dog food brand Winalot, has received more than a thousand touching stories about precious pets. People have shared how their dogs make their lives better every day, and how some have even helped their owners through extraordinarily difficult life circumstances.

Olympic gold-medallist and long-time dog owner Greg Rutherford was kind enough to share his own heart-warming tale about his beloved pooches, Murphy and Gus, at the start of the campaign. For Greg, "having dogs creates the perfect family," and he thinks "learning how to care for an animal" has especially benefitted his two young sons as they grow up.

Follow Greg's lead and tell us about your furry friends they could have pride of place on the website alongside other Great British Dogs. They'll also be in with a chance of winning Dog of the Month, which comes with a bundle of amazing prizes, including Winalot pouches and a personalised dog bed and bowl. Check out this awesome duo for some inspiration.



ENTER YOUR STORY NOW FOR THE CHANCE TO WIN AT

GREATBRITISHDOGS.CO.UK

Terms and conditions apply: see website for details

PURINA

FEEDING GREATNESS

Winalot

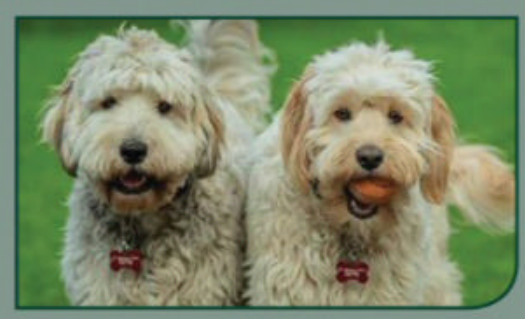
Since 1927

Celebrating great British dogs



MEET FORREST

"I'd hit rock bottom before I picked up Forrest," says owner Danielle. "I felt like I had no purpose in life and he completely saved me. Getting up to walk with him each morning has been incredible for my mental health and I've loved taking him to my favourite National Trust spots. I'm so excited to take him on more adventures."



MEET HARRY AND JASPER

"Harry and Jasper are my two loveable rogue Cockapoo boys," explains owner David. "They came to me shortly after my partner died very suddenly from brain cancer. They're so trusting and loving, and they love to play – and chew – and they're always ready to snuggle up when I need a cuddle. The house doesn't feel so empty with them here."

Winalot EVERYDAY HEROES Since 1927

FEEDING GREATNESS SINCE 1927

Winalot believes dogs are everyday heroes. That's why it's passionate about providing dogs across the country with hearty meals made with succulent meaty chunks and quality ingredients, and containing all the essential vitamins and minerals they need. It's the food generations of our dogs have grown up with, and it's the food for generations to come.

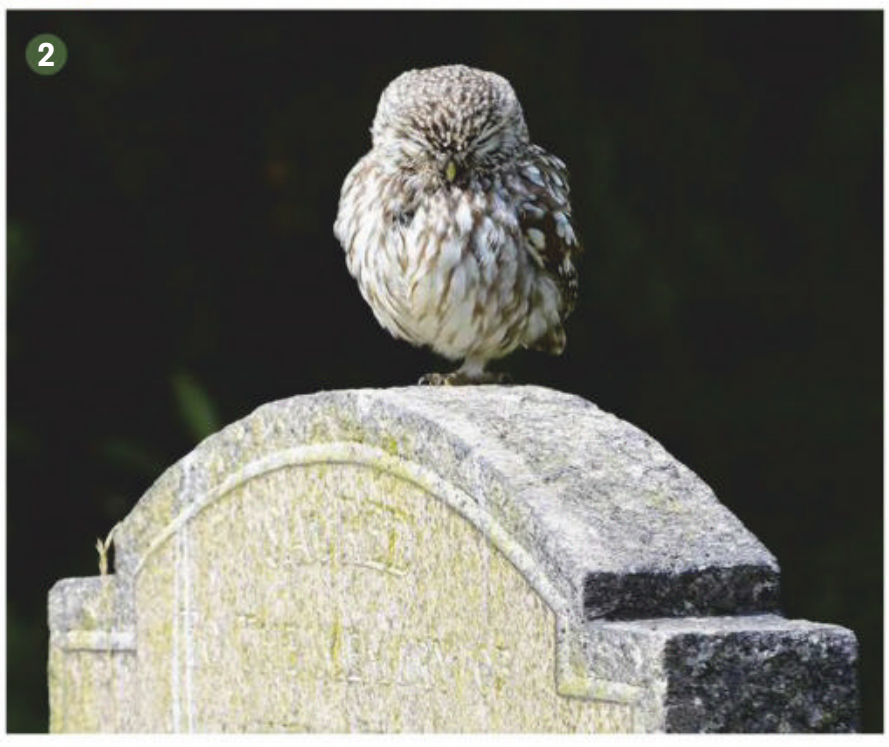


Your lockdown photos

With time at home to enjoy your gardens, local parks and countryside, many of you have sent us glorious photos taken during the lockdown. We decided to feature a selection – thank you for sharing your beautiful images!

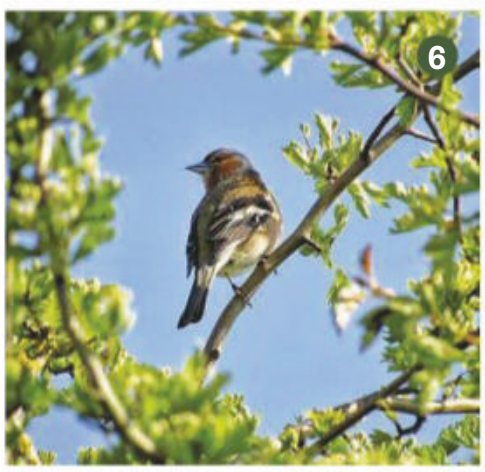








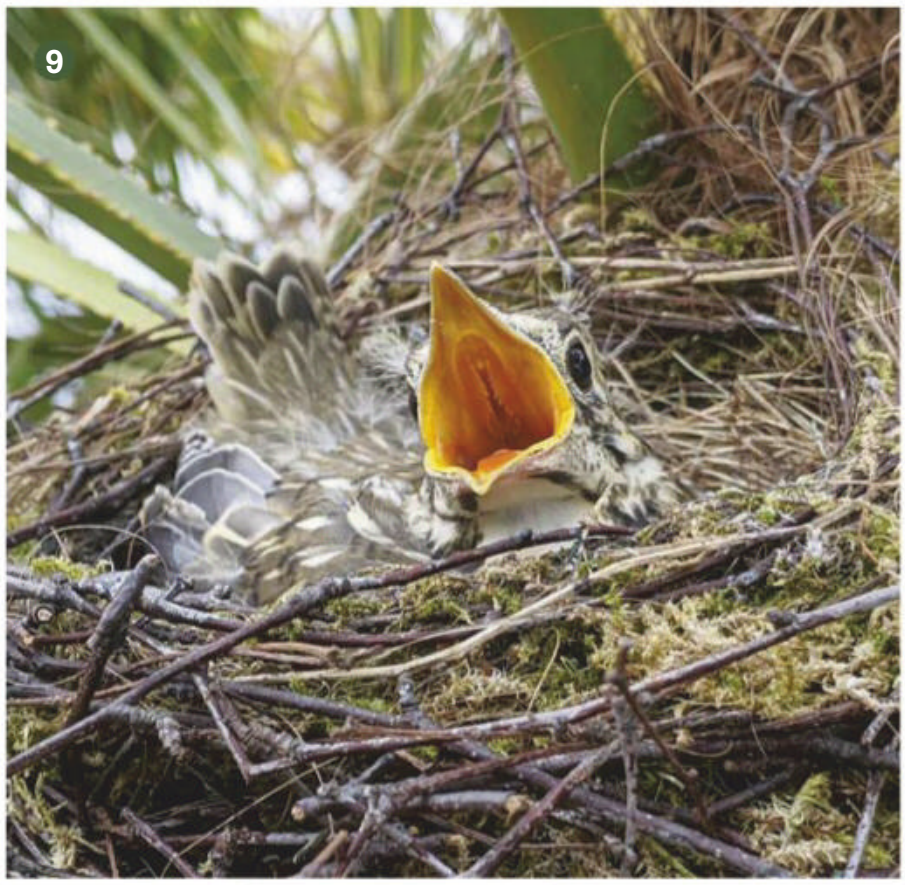




1 Orange-tip butterfly by **Tracey Laing,** County Durham **2 One foot on the grave** by **Helen Brassington,** North Yorkshire **3 Finding the perfect nesting material** by **Alison Pretious,** Kent **4 Fruit-tree in blossom** by **Lucy Coughlan,** Kent **5 Bountiful bluebells** by **Elaine Grandon,** Dorset **6 Morning birdsong** by **Rebecca Ferguson,** Lincolnshire **7 A very busy bee** by **Linda Galloway,** Clackmannanshire **8 Blue tit chat** by **Anne Hopper,** Northumberland













9 Hungry chick by **Phil Johnson,** West Yorkshire **10 Golden carapace** by **Delfino Dos Santos,** Buckinghamshire **11 Curious blackbird** by **David Stevenson,** Fife **12 Iris in my garden** by **Nicholas Grocot,** Cheshire **13 Dragonfly hatching** by **Annelliese Ball,** Cornwall **14 Bunny in the sun** by **Lucy Coughlan,** Kent **15 Robin red breast** by **Tamara Lawrence,** Hampshire **16 Dandelion detail** by **Martin Trewhella,** Wiltshire **17 Rare grasshopper** by **Gavin Beard,** Devon **18 Clover in flower** by **Ian Peaple,** Buckinghamshire **19 Macro view** by **Lisa Wood,** Surrey **20 Starling song** by **Timmy Woods**, Northumberland





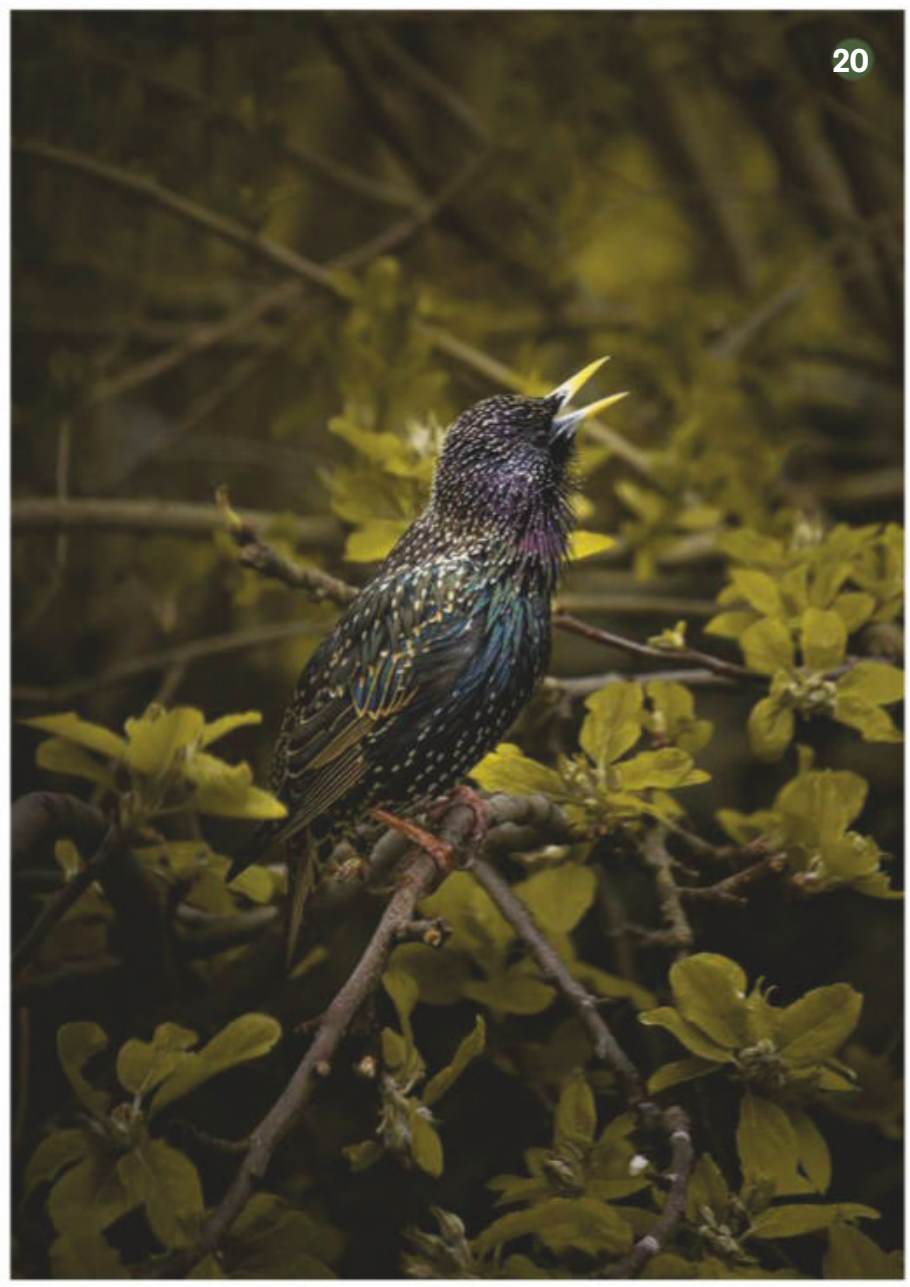






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FREE 20-PAGE MAGAZINE

OPINION

Sara Maitland

From transatlantic hugs to journeys to the stars, technology has been a lockdown saviour

Illustration: **Lynn Hatzius**



I turned 70 barely a fortnight before everyone had to self-isolate. Just before that, though, my family gave me a lovely birthday party. We didn't know how long it would be before we saw each other again, but we had a noisy happy dinner with speeches and cake and fireworks. And excellent presents.

And one of the presents turned out to be the perfect gift for what was about to happen: I was given a smartphone because I have no mobile access at home but do have broadband and my son and daughter thought it would allow me to WhatsApp with my grandchild in the USA. And, along with other features, it came with a stargazing app.

In southern Scotland, as in other places, we had one of the dreariest, wettest first quarters of the year, but with the equinox there was a total transformation and throughout April and the first half of May we enjoyed the most glorious spring. The joys of this spring were, interestingly enough, enhanced by the lockdown: the radical reduction in both road and air transport measurably improved the quality of the air, which improved the 'cleanness' of the atmosphere.

This had a number of spin-offs, including the extraordinary increase of birdsong, the flourishing of wildflowers (I have never seen the cotton grass on our peat moor as exuberant as it has been this year) and some beautifully clear night skies unmired by vapour trails or flashing lights. While it seems highly unlikely that all this was laid on solely for the delight of an elderly lady who happened to have acquired a new smartphone, it was a remarkable piece of luck!

STAR-STRUCK VIEWER

A stargazing or astronomy app allows the user to hold their smartphone up towards the sky and the stars it is pointed at appear on the screen with a whole lot of information about the type and distance of the stars, and about the constellations.

The only thing that seems to me to be missing, sadly, is the mythological stories that explain the names. The planet Mercury is so named because Mercury was the Roman's speedy messenger god and the planet nearest the sun whizzes round faster than any other; Mars was the god of war and this planet glows a bellicose red, while each of Jupiter's moons is named after one of the god's mistresses.

Venus was the goddess of love and the planet – which we often know as 'the morning star' – looks particularly beautiful. There are ancient stories for most of the constellations, too. This is not only fun but sharply reminds us how carefully the ancient civilisations observed the night skies, despite doing it without the aid of telescopes.

In fact, this technology is based on GPS – the Global Positioning System, a USA-owned satellite-based radio-navigation system – so I think I could use it even if there were a thick layer of cloud, but I don't want to. I want to go out into the dark and look at the stars and find something that appeals to me and then point my app at that and learn what it is.

Sometimes people call me a 'Luddite' because I can be darkly suspicious of – and even grumpy about – lots of modern technology, and of our increasing dependence on it and the way it can come between us and the natural world. But this new toy feels entirely wonderful. My granddaughter kissed me across the Atlantic and I can step out of my front door and the heavens are open to me and I can become friends with every star. Try it.



Sara Maitland is a writer who lives in Dumfries and Galloway. Her works include *A Book of Silence* and *Gossip from the Forest*

Have your say What do you think about the issues raised here? Write to the address on page three or email **editor@countryfile.com**

DISCOVER

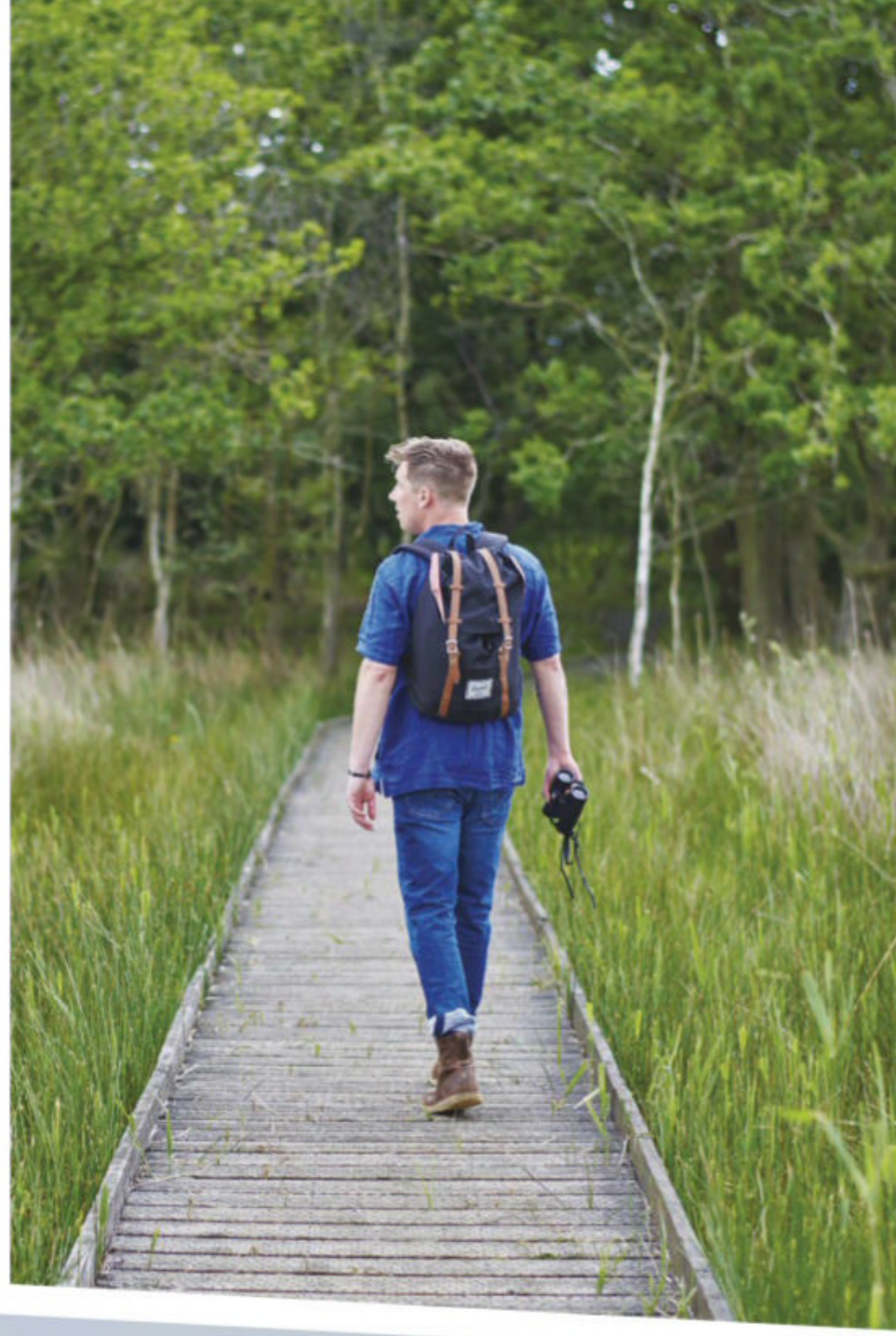
THE WILD SIDE OF THE BROADS

In summer, the idyllic wetlands of Suffolk and Norfolk teem with butterflies, birds and aquatic life. Immerse yourself in this tranquil waterworld with **Matt Gaw**

Matt navigates beautiful Horsey Mere, an important bird habitat on the Broads' eastern edge RIGHT, TOP Spot kingfishers, terns and herons from the 1.5-mile Barton Broad Boardwalk near Neatishead RIGHT You're more likely to hear the male bittern's distinctive booming call than see this rare and elusive bird, camouflaged among the reedbeds on the Norfolk Broads

Photos: Mike Harrington, Getty







Built in 1897, Boardman's Drainage Windmill on the River Ant is an open-framed timber trestle mill, one of only three built to this design still standing on the Broads

There is a quiet magic to the Broads. A feeling that you're not so much moving through a landscape, but through time. In a place of wide water and wider skies, with its whispering reeds, abundant wildlife, sail-powered boats and old windpumps, it is as if modern life hasn't quite caught up.

The Broads is the newest of the UK's 10 national parks and the only one that's almost exclusively wetland. For 117 square miles its water sogs across Norfolk and drips into Suffolk. The rivers Bure, Ant, Thurne, Yare, Chet, Waveney and Wensum wind across the region, connecting with more than 60 shallow lakes or broads, from the biggest at Barton and Hickling to the small, yet beautiful, wood-lined waters of Salhouse Broad.

Once thought to be natural, the Broads are in fact the flooded remnants of ancient peat diggings. This doesn't make them any less wild: these wetlands have been moulded and filled with nature. More than 11,000 species, including 25% of the UK's rarest animals and plants, are found here.

If the rivers, broads, dykes, marshes, bogs, meadows and wet woodlands attract wildlife, they attract people too. With 120 miles of navigable water, this is the UK's wild Venice: a waterscape of wonder and wandering, pulling in seven million visitors each year. While the boating centres of **Wroxham** and **Potter Heigham** can become busy, it's still easy to find peace and wildlife, whether you travel by boat, foot or bike. Hidden away in the curved rump of East Anglia, the Broads remain, as the Norfolk naturalist Ted Ellis said, "a breathing place for the cure of souls".



"THE BROADS REMAIN 'A BREATHING PLACE FOR THE CURE OF SOULS'"

ON THE WATER

The canoe bobs with the gentlest of swells as I stop paddling to get my bearings. A light breeze is purring across the open water of Hickling Broad and whispering into the reeds. They make a dry, papery hiss, a sound known here as a 'fizmer'.

The Pleasure Boat Inn and staithe where I launched are already someway behind me and in front everything is water. There's a temptation to take what feels like the shortest route, to head straight out, but instead, I cling to the sides. I'm not in a rush. Besides, it's close to the reeds where the real opportunities are, both to spot wildlife and to see the narrow creeks, which can only be





explored in a canoe. There are plenty of great places to paddle in the Broads: from the white water at Horstead Mill and through pretty **Coltishall**, to a route across Barton Broad and up the River Ant to reach the bosky seclusion of the kingfisher-haunted Dilham Canal.

But the waters around Hickling, one of the Broads' 30 nature reserves, have a reputation for wildness I couldn't resist. As the broad narrows into the River Thurne, the low, wind-pushed humps of open water are replaced by a surface of bottle-green glass. I pause to watch a marsh harrier ride a thermal, her wings held in a shallow, trembling V, before I break off from the river's main flow, easing into thin slices of dark water where the world disappears behind six-foot-tall reeds. Broad-bodied chasers, fat as wax crayons, whir past. A banded demoiselle lands on the canoe's bow and sits, flexing its electric-blue abdomen, closed wings marked with a spot like an inky thumbprint.

The river bends south, flowing past mooring sites perfect for a riverside picnic, to where a meandering dyke connects with Horsey Mere. The mere is only open to boats between March and November due to its importance for wintering birds, and today its entrance is guarded by a dagger-billed heron. I drift past this sentry, heading towards a thatched boathouse on the opposite shore before taking the dyke towards Horsey Windpump.

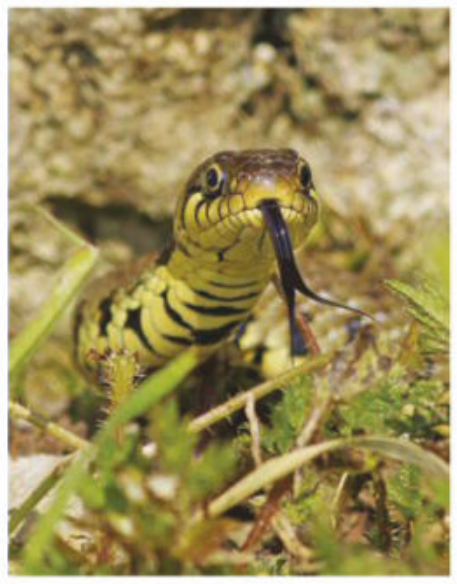
I grab tea at the National Trust café and eat my lunch on a bench overlooking the mere, where there is a well-used otter slide

TOP Beautiful boathouses thatched with local reeds add bucolic charm to Hickling Broad
ABOVE Matt paddles past Horsey Waterpump, built in 1912 on the foundations of previous mills
OPPOSITE The elegant banded demoiselle sports a distinctive smudgy black spot on its wings

Photos Mike Harrington, Alamy, Getty

One of our most spectacular native butterflies, the beautiful swallowtail is only found on the Norfolk Broads. Numbers of this wet fenland specialist declined last century, but improved management of open fen vegetation in recent decades has boosted the population







RIGHT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP **Matt walks a mowed path beside the high, wild marsh vegetation at Hickling Broad Nature Reserve; travelling by bicycle allows the Broads to drift by under two wheels; the harmless green and yellow grass snake is the longest in Britain**

– a place where a rudder-tailed shape-shifter has poured itself into the water, moving from humpbacked landlubber to liquid muscle.

The sun is high when I get back in the canoe. The green of the water is now leafed with sun-scalded gold. Above the reeds of the mere I see my very first swallowtail, the UK's largest native butterfly and one of the rarest (apart from a few migrants, it is only found in the Broads). I try to keep pace with it as it flies on large custard-coloured wings that are veined with black like the feathered icing on a cream slice.

I continue back the way I came, now sharing the water with three or four sailing boats, which tack and turn in front of me, seeking the wind. There is an oldness to the water here, both in the variety of wildlife and in the boats that move across it. Maybe it is nostalgic, rose-tinted spectacles or perhaps it is the vivid-green lens of wild water.

ON TWO WHEELS

You don't have to be on the water to get under the wild skin of the Broads. A bike is a quiet, two-wheeled passport to a world of interconnected water, woods, farm, fen and meadow; a chance to see how wildlife spills from the nature reserves to fill country lanes and pub-studded villages. The Broads' flatness – its highest point is just 38m at Strumpshaw Hill – also means you don't have to break a sweat in the process.

There are a wealth of good circular routes to explore: around **Burgh St Peter Staithe** and **Wheatacre** to visit Stanley Hills, a heathland where grass snakes and lizards can be seen; or the Three Rivers Loop taking in the Chet, Yare and Waveney.

> "THE MINUTES SLIP AWAY IN THE SILENT SHADE OF THATCHED CHURCHES"

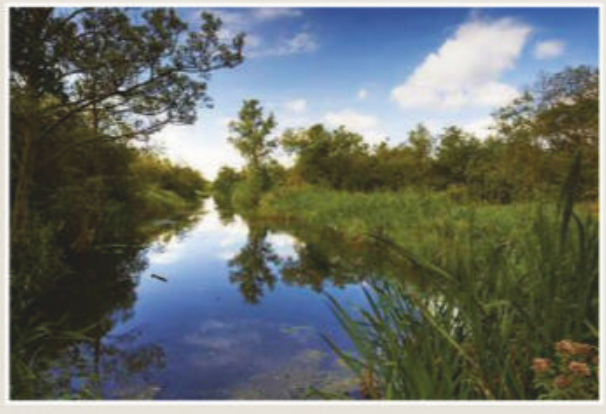
Today, I've returned to an old favourite: an 11.5-mile ride from **Horning** to **Hoveton**. I've been told it's a journey you can complete in just over two hours, but it usually takes me double that, the minutes slipping away in the silent shade of thatched churches and the foot-cooling waters at parish staithes. But going slow – the fresh air, the time to notice – is important; it is as much a part of this

THE BROADS' BEST NATURE RESERVES

Cockshoot Broad, near Woodbastwick
Secluded and tranquil, this Norfolk Wildlife Trust site (pictured) is part of the Bure Marshes National Nature Reserve and is famous for its water lilies. Look out for damselflies and the streak of a kingfisher. **norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/nature-reserves/reserves/cockshoot-broad#TabsReserveTabs_TabAbout**

Strumpshaw Fen, six miles from Norwich
This RSPB reserve is the place to go for summer colour, with wonderful displays of wildflowers, including six species of orchid. The rare Norfolk hawker dragonfly and swallowtail butterfly can also be seen here. **rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/strumpshaw-fen/**

Carlton Marshes, Lowestoft
Situated at the southern gateway to the Broads, this Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve (voted second-best nature reserve in the UK in this year's *BBC Countryfile Magazine* Awards) is home to the rare fen raft spider as well as a newly opened visitor centre. Look out for southern marsh orchid and the beautiful marsh pea. **suffolkwildlifetrust.org/carlton**



Photos Alamy, Getty, Mike Harrington



place as the water. I set off from Broadland Cycle Hire and swing down into the village of Horning on the north bank of the River Bure, wheeling past waterside homes to get supplies (mostly cake) at The Galley, before returning to the country lanes that head towards the RAF Radar Museum and Neatishead Hall.

Although, like most of the cycling here, the route is road-based, it is a road in name only. Bordered by hedges thick with birds, bramble and the milk-white splashes of cow parsley and elderflower, there are no cars to be seen. All is quiet apart from the chatter of swallows and the gravel-crunch of slowly spinning wheels.

I follow oak-shaded lanes to St Michael's of Irstead, a small and charming thatched church just 150m from **Irstead Shoals** staithe, where old willows fan the waters of the River Ant. The route then leads north, past Norfolk Wildlife Trust's nature reserve at Barton Broad, through the small village of **Neatishead** and back into open countryside.

Turning right at **Barton Turf**, I pause to watch a young ribbon of a grass snake unwind from its roadside bask, before reaching Pennygate staithe, where I polish off the last of my cake as dragonflies flicker and fuzz over the water.



TOP Willowy reeds give way to waterside gardens and pretty thatched boathouses near Horning on the River Bure
ABOVE Matt pauses to refuel and get essential cake supplies at The Galley café and deli in Horning

Sleepy and with my face tightened with sun, I saddle up to complete the loop, picking up tea and a bottle of local cider for later at Wroxham Barns. I stop once more at Hoveton Hall Gardens where I walk in Ashmanhaugh Wood, hoping to see a white admiral, a butterfly whose flight reminds me of my cycling technique – flap, flap, glide.

ON TWO FEET

Stretching for 37.5 meandering miles, the Wherryman's Way wends through the very heart of the Broads, following the banks of the River Yare as it slides through open marshes, grazing meadows and villages, all the way from **Norwich** to **Great Yarmouth**. The route, named after the black-sailed cargo-carrying barges that once sailed from city to the sea, takes about three days to complete.

I've walked sections of the Wherryman's before (there are plenty of circular and there-and-back routes across its length), with one of the most memorable involving a request stop at Berney Arms railway station and a rain-streaked stroll across the atmospheric Halvergate Marsh.

This evening, I'm a little way upstream, or up-path, at **Reedham**. It's a village with an interesting history; once a coastal settlement, it became landlocked as the marshes were slowly drained. Now several miles from the sea, there is still a strange feeling of salt and spray, an expectancy of a sea view.

I park at the village quay and walk up the wooden steps on to Wherryman's Way. The evening light is honey-soft, dripping into the reed-fringed River Yare and the dykes to my right, while the air is sweet with meadow grass from the cattle-freckled grazing marsh to my left. I go slow, past the red mill, listening out for the plop of water vole and searching for the scale-pearled spraints of otters.



TOP Saving users a 30-mile journey, Reedham Ferry can carry three cars across the River Yare
ABOVE The small brown skylark is distinguished by its head crest, trilling song and dramatic display flight, in which it rises almost vertically into the air

I intended to walk an 11-mile circular walk to the tar-black flanks of the Berney Arms Windmill, but now I am tempted to retrace my steps and get the chain ferry that clanks its way across the Yare to join the Wherryman's Way on the other bank. Or perhaps I could just relax with a drink at The Ferry Inn.

I sit with my back against a fence post and look at the dykes and think about how they hold more wildlife than I've seen for weeks: invertebrates and plant life, such as greater bladderwort and frogbit. The skylarks are singing, their frenetic, scribbling song stitching wide skies and wet land together. Sometimes, it's not about the miles walked. Sitting still can take you even further. CF



Matt Gaw is a nature writer and journalist based in Suffolk. His second book, *Under the Stars: A Journey into Light* (Elliot & Thompson), is out now.

Photos RSPB Images, Alamy, Mike Harrington


Thank you...
To the wonderful June, Rukudzo and Jake
for helping me and my husband Les stay safe,
happy and well stocked during the pandemic.
[From homeowner Ann, Isabella House]
McCarthy & Stone

BEST OF THE BROADS

What to do and where to stay in the Broads, by **Matt Gaw**



GETTING AROUND

CANOE RENTAL

The Canoe Man, Wroxham

The place to go for guided tours, hire, or advice on exploring Broadland waters by canoe.
01603 783777, thecanoeman.com

Whispering Reeds Boats Ltd, Hickling

Ideally placed to slip on to Hickling, one of the largest and wildest of the broads.
01692 598314, whisperingreeds.net

Waveney River Centre, Beccles

As well as canoe hire, the centre offers holiday accommodation and a pub and restaurant.
01502 677343, waveneyrivercentre.co.uk

BIKE RENTAL

Broadland Cycle Hire, Hoveton

Based in the car park of BeWILDerwood adventure park, there are plenty of mapped routes to explore.
07747 483154, broadlandcyclehire.co.uk

Broads by Cycle

Book a bike online for two to 12 hours and collect it from a docking station at Hoveton, Horning or Ludham Bridge. Hire starts from £8. **broadsbycycle.co.uk**

WALK

For maps of Wherryman's Way and its circular routes: **norfolk.gov.uk/out-and-about-in-norfolk/norfolk-trails/short-and-circular-walks/wherrymans-way**

COVID-19

Please abide by Government advice on travel, and remain at home if recommended to do so. The information on these pages is meant to assist you once restrictions have been lifted.



ACCESSIBLE BROADS

Barton Broad Boardwalk, Neatishead

Everyone can access the wildness of the Broads on this 1.5-mile, wheelchair and buggy-friendly stroll over the marshy waters of Barton Broad. The route, along an elevated boardwalk, features a raised viewing platform and plenty of places to rest and enjoy the scenery. A car park for disabled visitors is located right next to the path.

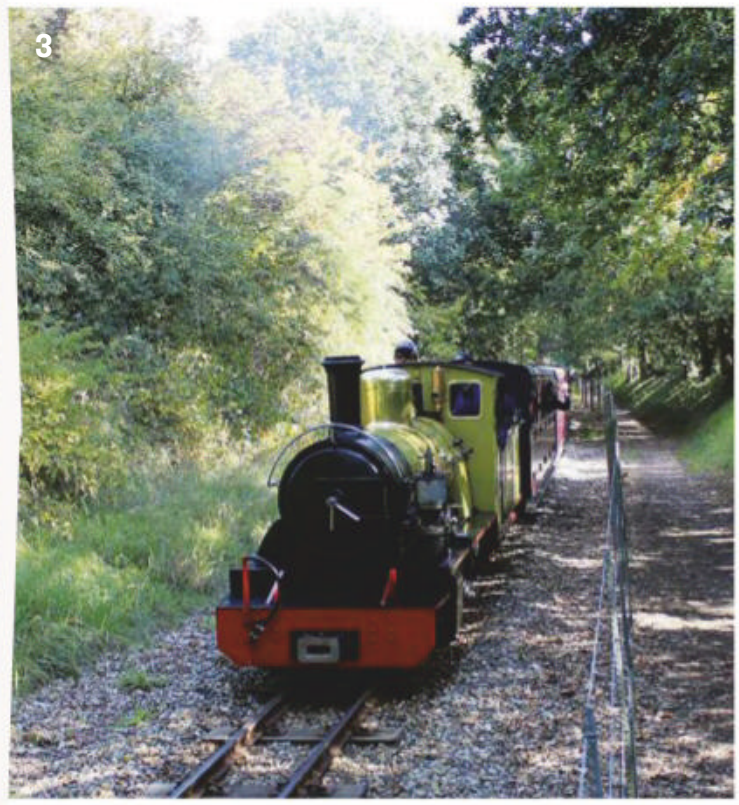




Photos Mike Harrington Map Laura Hallett







RAINY DAYS

1. Museum of the Broads, Stalham

From boats to bitterns, the museum is a treasure trove of Broadland life. Exhibits range from a pleasure wherry piano and the story of marshmen to a rather startled-looking stuffed water vole. **museumofthebroads.org.uk**

2. Boat trips, Wroxham

Canoeing in a downpour might not be everyone's cup of tea, but there are plenty of other ways to see what's wild on the water without getting wet. Head to Wroxham or Potter Heigham to hire a covered boat.

3. The Bure Valley Railway, Aylsham

When the weather turns, let the train take the strain. The Bure Valley Railway, first opened in 1880, is a chance to get a different perspective on the Broads and its wildlife. **01263 733858, bvrw.co.uk**

CAFÉS



Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden, South Walsham

The tearoom in this secret Broadland hideaway is free to enter even for non-garden visitors. The cream tea is belt-bustingly good. **01603 270449, fairhavengarden.co.uk**

A Piece of Cake, Coltishall

A modern, light café serving everything from breakfast to afternoon tea. Homemade and delicious. Booking advised. **01603 736090, coltishallcakes.co.uk**

ESSENTIAL READING

Norfolk Broads Canoe and Kayak Guide by Steve Maloney covers pretty much every stretch of water in the National Park. British Canoeing also has some great routes online at **britishcanoeing.org.uk**.

The Broads by Bike (a £3 pamphlet for sale at Broadlands Cycle Centre) is very handy.

Alternatively, throw all the maps to the wind and dive into Arthur Ransome's *Swallow and Amazons* series. *Coot Club* and *The Big Six* were based on the Broads and are perfect to reignite that childhood thrill of adventure.



ACCOMMODATION



The Norfolk Mead, Coltishall

Get a taste of luxury at this Georgian country house on the banks of the River Bure. Fine dining and spa treatments are on offer. Prices from £135 a night. **01603 737531, norfolkmead.co.uk**



The Boathouse, Ormesby Broad

Set in 4.5 hectares of parkland on the banks of Ormesby Broad, this restored pub offers both rooms and self-catering woodland lodges. Prices from £90 a night. **01493 730342, theboathouseormesbybroad.co.uk**

Reedham Ferry Complex, Reedham

A caravan and camping site in a lovely landscaped spot, which is just a stone's throw from one of the Broads' best waterside pubs. Prices from £13 a night. **01493 700999, reedhamferry.co.uk**



Martham Mill, Martham

Immerse yourself in Broadland life and spend a week in this restored windmill, complete with its very own boat. Prices from £575 for four people a week. **quirkyaccom.com/martham-mill**

Photos Alamy



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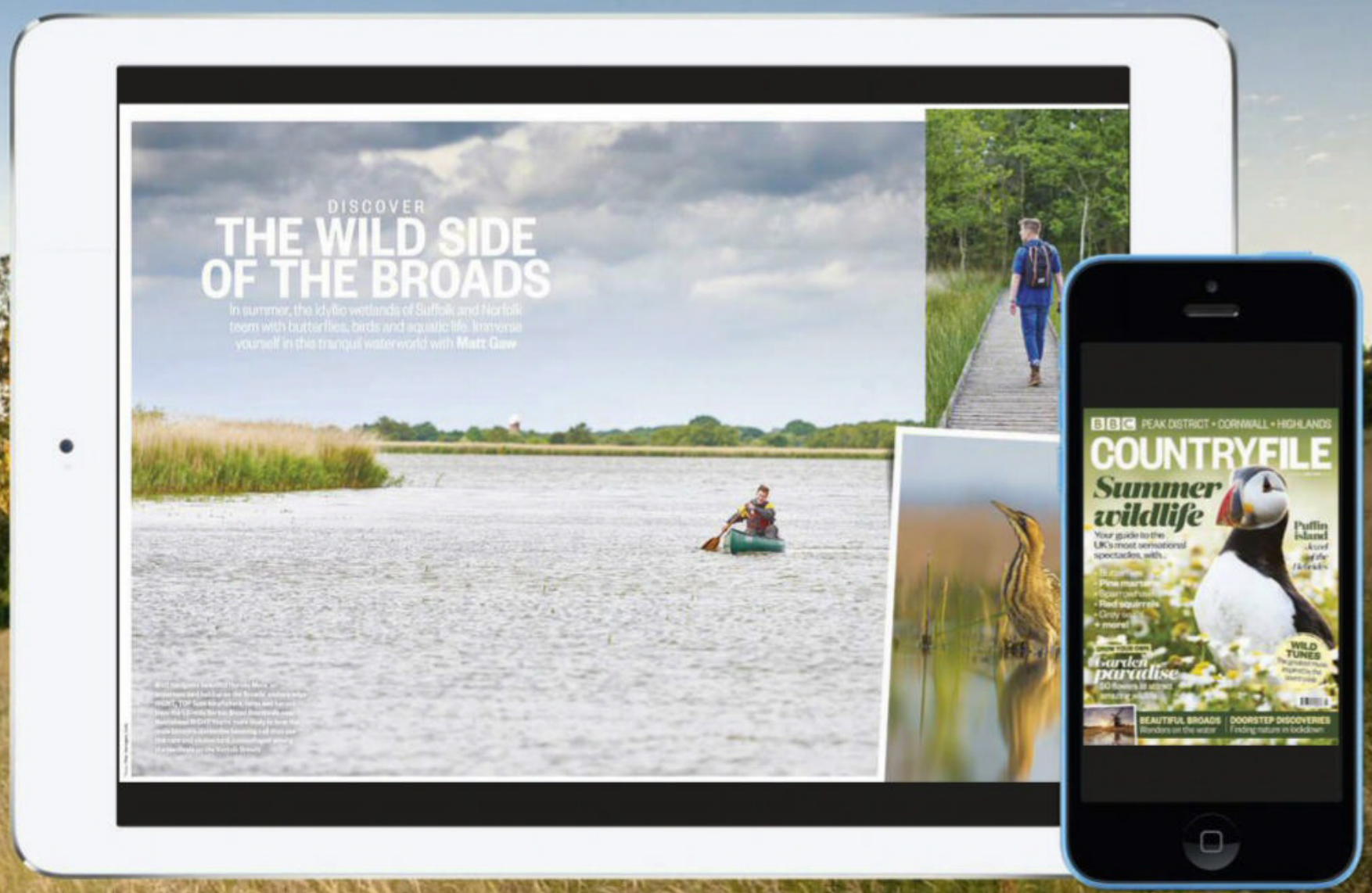
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Turn part of your lawn into a wildflower meadow – with poppies, clover, toadflax or cornflowers – and you'll create food and a valuable ecosystem for a wide range of insects, from honeybees and hawkmoths to earwigs and butterflies

Growing together

For more gardening ideas, tune in to *Gardener's World*, Fridays and Sundays on BBC Two.

BBC TWO

Grow your own

NATURE PARADISE

Want to do your bit for the planet by transforming your garden into a beautiful wildlife haven? Then fill it with the right flowers through the seasons, says **Dave Goulson**

Photo: GAP





It's my favourite time of year: high summer, when the days are long and warm, and the wildlife in my garden is at its annual peak of activity. The lavender and catmint are in full bloom and busy with slender brown honeybees, clumsy, furry and colourful bumblebees, yellow-and-black metallic hoverflies and, every now and then, the blur of a hummingbird hawkmoth, long tongue extended, dashing from flower to flower.

My garden may not be the tidiest; the lawn is a little shaggier than some might like, but it's full of flowers. In the borders, wildflowers coexist with cottage garden flowers, herbs, chickens, fruit trees and vegetables in a slightly chaotic tangle, but it's full of life, and produces almost enough food to feed my family.

If we manage them gently, our gardens can be hugely rich ecosystems, teeming with life of all sorts. In an obsessive 30-year study of her very small urban garden in Leicester, Jenny Owen recorded more than 2,500 species of plants and animals, most of them different types of insects.

Insects make the world go round. They pollinate crops and wildflowers, recycle dead leaves, dung and animal corpses, control pests, help keep the soil healthy, and are food for many birds, lizards, amphibians, bats and other small mammals. All of this happens in gardens.

"If we manage them gently, our gardens can be hugely rich ecosystems, teeming with life"

1 Catmint is one of the best all-round garden plants for bees, including white-tailed bumblebees
2 A large, day-flying hummingbird hawkmoth uses its long proboscis to feed from valerian flowers

Insects are also wonderful and beautiful, with fascinating and sometimes peculiar lifecycles that play out right under our noses, usually unnoticed: earwigs tenderly care for their young; bumblebee queens battle to rear their offspring against the threat of cuckoo bees and parasitic wasps; ants indulge in tribal warfare.

It is worrying that insects are in decline (see box opposite), but unlike many other big global



3 Small tortoiseshell butterflies love the white marjoram flowers in this lush garden border

environmental issues about which we might feel helpless, we can get directly involved in helping them, and see the benefits. We can provide food and a home for innumerable insects in our gardens.

SELECTING INSECT-FRIENDLY PLANTS

The first step in turning your garden into a haven for insects is to choose the right plants. Flowers evolved to attract insects some 300 million years ago, so you might think that all flowers would be good for insects, but sadly this is not so.

Plant breeders have tinkered with flowers over many years, selecting double varieties, larger blooms, unusual colours and so on, and in doing so have often created flowers that have lost their original purpose – they no longer attract insects. Most annual bedding plants, such as busy lizzies, begonias, pansies, petunias and pelargoniums are hopeless for insects, as are most 'double' varieties, which have extra petals instead of the pollen-producing

LAWN REVOLUTION

The very simplest thing we can do for wildlife in our gardens is mow less often, saving you time and petrol. Most lawns contain flowers: clovers, trefoils, selfheal, daisies, speedwell, buttercups and more. They just never get to flower if we are obsessively cutting neat stripes every week or two. The next time you get the urge to mow, make yourself a refreshing drink instead, sit down in a garden chair and enjoy the gentle drone of bees buzzing among the flowers. You might cut part of your lawn just once a year in late summer, creating your very own wildflower meadow.





WHY ARE INSECT NUMBERS FALLING?

Sadly, insects are in decline, in the UK and around the world. UK butterfly populations have roughly halved since the 1970s, while the number of monarch butterflies in North America has declined by 90% in 20 years. A German study showed that flying insect 'biomass' has fallen by 75% since 1989. Most of us of a certain age can remember car windscreens covered in splatted insects, a phenomenon not seen for decades. Habitat loss to intensive monoculture farming, the widespread use of insecticides, light pollution and climate change are all contributing to these declines.

Photos Getty, Alamy, GAP





anthers. Beware also that many plants on sale in garden centres will contain pesticide residues.

Some of my favourite plants for pollinators are listed on the next three pages. They include wildflowers, which are usually great for native insects, and also many traditional cottage garden plants. Most are very easy to grow, and most are perennials so they don't need replacing every year.

Different plants tend to attract different insects, depending on the shape of the flower. Foxgloves, for example, attract only species of bumblebee that have long tongues, since without these the bees cannot reach the nectar. Shallow flowers, such as helenium and single roses, attract short-tongued bees and hoverflies, and marjoram is very attractive to butterflies. It is great to have a mix, to cater for as many insects as possible. Try also to have flowers through the year, from when the first hungry bumblebee queens emerge in early March through to October when the last few insects are feeding up for hibernation.

4 Friends of the Earth planted this wildflower garden in Cwmbran, South Wales as part of its 'Bee Cause' campaign
5 A bee hotel provides a valuable nesting site for solitary bees

Gardens cover nearly half a million hectares of the UK, an area greater than all of our nature reserves. Imagine if most of them were pesticide-free, with a mini-wildflower meadow, pollinator-friendly flowers, a bee hotel, a small pond and compost heap. Our gardens could become a vast network of tiny nature reserves, supporting biodiversity, storing carbon in the soil and trees, and providing home-grown food. We could invite nature to come and live with us in our gardens, so that our children grow up with the sight and sound of buzzing bees, the flashing colours of butterfly's wings, birdsong, and the croak of toads in the garden pond.

OTHER WAYS TO ATTRACT WILDLIFE

Aside from growing the right herbaceous flowers, there are many other ways you can entice more wildlife to come and live with you. Bee hotels provide nest sites for some solitary bees, while a 'hoverfly lagoon' might attract some types of hoverfly that have aquatic larvae. Ponds are of course wonderful habitats for insects, such as dragonflies, damselflies, caddis flies and whirligig beetles. A compost heap will team with insect life. If you have room for a flowering fruit tree



(even a small one on a dwarfing rootstock), you will provide blossom for pollinators, and a host of nooks and crannies for insects to live, as well as getting your own zero-food-miles fresh fruit. Of course, don't use insecticides; there's no need, if you have a healthy garden with natural pest control, such as ladybirds and lacewings.



Dave Goulson is professor of biology at the University of Sussex, specialising in bumblebees. He is author of a number of books about insects; the most recent is *The Garden Jungle*, which shows how to turn our gardens into miniature nature reserves.

PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS

This is my selection of the best 24 plants to grow in your garden to provide food for pollinators through the seasons.

SPRING

A Lungwort
Pulmonaria officinalis
A great nectar resource for hungry queen bumblebees in very early spring, it may also attract the wonderful hairy-footed flower bee. An easy perennial to grow, happy in shade or in full sun, lungwort only grows to about 25cm, so it's best near the front of a border.

B Grape hyacinth
Muscari armeniacum
This is a small plant, up to about 20cm tall, bearing clusters of violet-blue, egg-shaped flowers in spring. An undemanding plant, it's great for edging a border, sprinkling in a rockery and growing under shrubs. Very attractive to bumblebees and bee flies.

C Flowering currant
Ribes sanguineum
Growing to about 2m tall, this shrub flowers from late March through April. I see bumblebee queens on mine, both those that have recently emerged from hibernation and some that are already collecting pollen for their brood. It thrives in sun or partial shade.

D Perennial wallflower
Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve'
A woody evergreen perennial up to 80cm tall, flowering almost all year, although the clusters of purple flowers are at their most prolific in spring. It attracts short-tongued bumblebees, solitary bees and butterflies. *Erysimum* grows best in a sunny, well-drained spot and makes an attractive pot plant for patios.

EARLY TO MID-SUMMER

E Comfrey
Symphytum officinale
Comfrey is a very hardy perennial, great for the back of a herbaceous border or a forgotten corner where it will look after itself. It has a very long flowering period with a peak in late May and June, followed by smaller numbers of flowers through to October.

F Geranium 'Rozanne'
Most hardy geraniums are very attractive to bees, and are easy-to-grow perennials suitable for the front or middle of a border, flowering mainly in May and June. If cut back after flowering, most types will flower again, providing blooms all summer.

G Foxglove
Digitalis purpurea
This very familiar and beautiful cottage-garden and woodland flower is a favourite with long-tongued bumblebees. Foxgloves are usually biennial, flowering in their second year. They will grow in most conditions, being quite happy in moderate shade or sun and in almost any soil.

H Exotic peony
Paeonia peregrina
Large magenta flowers in May and June attract crowds of honey bees and bumblebees. The plants grow to about 80cm tall and wide, ideal for the middle of a sunny border.


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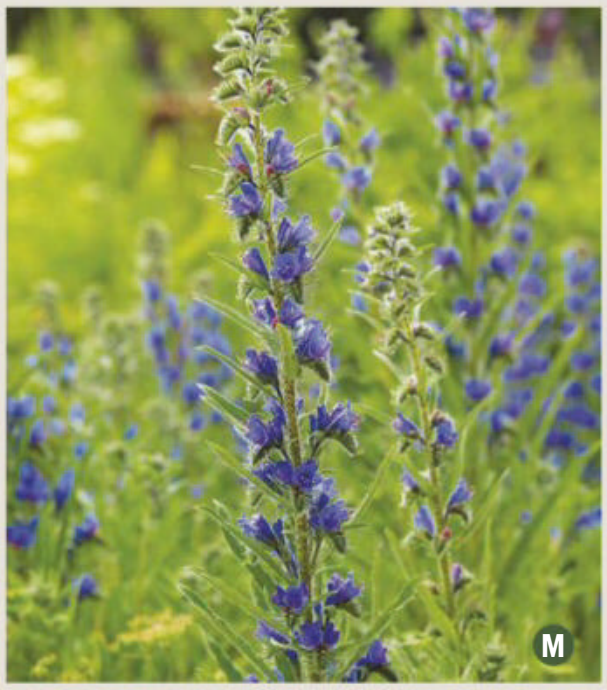
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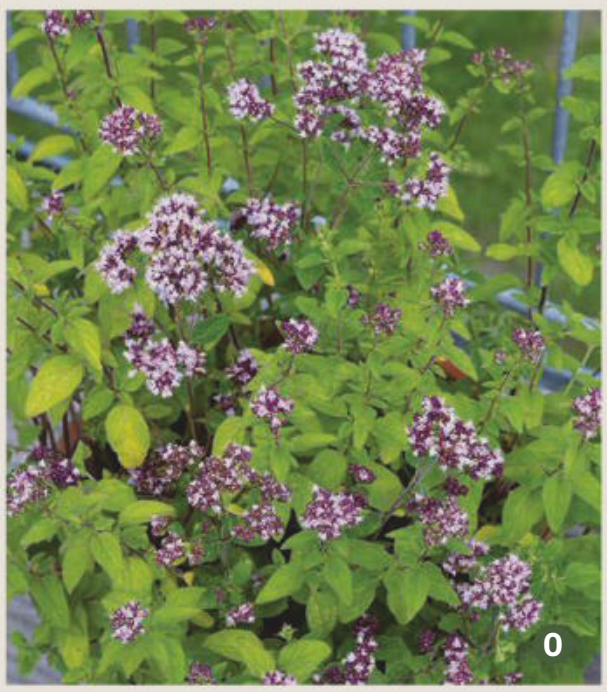


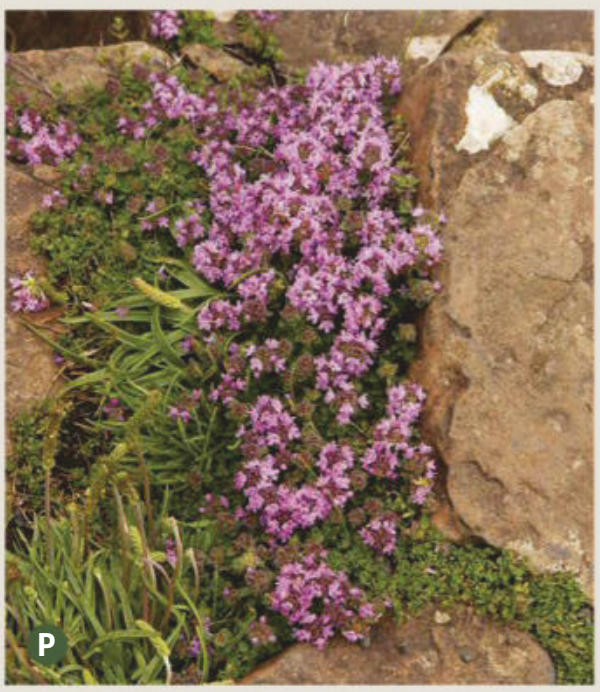












HIGH SUMMER

I Catmint
Nepeta racemosa and others
A fantastic cottage-garden classic, one of the best all-round garden plants for bees of a wide range of species. Gently sprawling plants bear an abundance of soft-blue flowers. It's very easy to grow almost anywhere, with a long flowering period from late May to the end of summer.

J Plume thistle *Cirsium rivulare 'Atropurpureum'*
A great plant for bumblebees in high summer, this species is not spiny like its wild thistle relatives, and is quite at home in a flower bed. The rosettes of dense green leaves send up purple, nodding flower heads on stems up to 1m tall from June to August.

K Lesser calamint
Calamintha nepeta
An understated, aromatic perennial herb growing to about 60cm, and bearing loose clusters of small white or pale pink flowers from early summer to autumn. It may not look impressive, but it is much loved by all types of bee. Easy to grow, preferring a well-drained position if possible, it is suited to growing in pots.

L Blue tansy
Phacelia tanacetifolia
An annual plant sometimes sold as a green manure, *Phacelia* is spectacularly attractive to all sorts of short-tongued bees and hoverflies. Seeds can be sown direct in a border, and should flower eight weeks later. The clusters of purple flowers produce abundant nectar and plentiful purple pollen on very long anthers that give the flowers a spiky appearance. Sow seeds in autumn for early spring flowering, or any time in spring to early summer.

M Viper's bugloss
Echium vulgare
This stunning biennial wildflower grows to about a metre tall. Flowering in July and August, it is absolutely loved by bees of all types for its copious nectar. Viper's bugloss likes a sunny, well-drained site and is very easily grown from seed.

N Lavender
Lavandula
This stately mauve-flowered perennial is one of the best plants to grow if you want to guarantee a nectar supply in July and August for a range of bees, moths and butterflies. Dutch lavender, *Lavandula x intermedia*, is the best species, with variety 'Gros Bleu' best of all for pollinators.

O Marjoram
Origanum vulgare
Marjoram is a great all-rounder, very easy to grow, attractive to heaps of different pollinators and good for cooking, too. Marjoram is a tough perennial native, growing to about 80cm tall, and it loves a sunny position, also growing happily in a pot.

P Thyme
Thymus polytrichus
As well as bumblebees, thyme attracts hoverflies and honey bees in abundance to its clusters of small purple flowers. This is a lovely, rambling perennial plant for a pot, the cracks in a patio, a rockery, or in the front of a border. Thyme prefers a sunny, well-drained position, and is tolerant of drought.

Q Field scabious
Knautia arvensis
A lovely native meadow perennial, one of my favourites, perfect for a sunny cottage garden border or meadow area. I love the powder-puff blue of the flowers in July and August, and bees, butterflies and hoverflies seem keen too. Birds, such as goldfinches, enjoy the seeds in winter. Flowers in July and August.

R Giant hyssop
Agastache
One of the very best plants for bees, giant hyssop is a clump-forming perennial that likes a sunny, well-drained border. Forms very attractive clumps of blue flower spikes up to 1m tall in late summer. The variety 'Blackadder' seems particularly good.

S Dahlia
'Bishop of Llandaff'
Dahlias feature in few lists of recommended plants for pollinators, but single varieties such as this one can be fantastic magnets for bumblebees (avoid the 'cactus' or 'pompom' varieties, which are showy but useless). 'Bishop of Llandaff' has brilliant red flowers and purplish foliage, grows up to 1m tall and flowers from August through to the first frosts. The tubers are sensitive to frost, so they are best dug up and stored for the winter.

T Sneezeweed *Helenium*
Producing glowing, red, orange or yellow daisy-like flowers on tall stems up to a metre, helenium is a magnet for honey bees, solitary bees and hoverflies from August through to October. There are a number of species and hybrid garden varieties: 'Moerheim Beauty' is an excellent variety I have tried. Helenium prefers a well-drained soil in full sun.

U Goldenrod *Solidago*
These clump-forming perennials usually grow to about a metre tall, producing very attractive arching sprays of tiny yellow flowers in late summer and autumn. Goldenrods are attractive to many different bees, including bumblebees, honey bees, sweat bees and nomad bees. They can thrive in very poor soil, but prefer an open situation.

V Rose climbers *Rosa*
Roses are among the most familiar of ornamental plants, having been cultivated for millennia. There are over 300 species and countless cultivars. Only the single-petal varieties tend to be attractive to pollinators.

W Ivy *Hedera helix*
Ivy is not popular with many gardeners, but it should be. The small, greenish-yellow clusters of flowers that appear in September are inconspicuous, but they attract all manner of insects, including butterflies such as the red admiral stocking up on sugar for hibernation, and honey bees, bumblebees, solitary bees, wasps and beetles.

X *Hydrangea serratifolia*
A slow-growing evergreen climber, with the potential to reach 12m or more in height. It has glossy, very large leaves and clusters of creamy-white flowers in July and August which become alive with bees, mainly honey bees and short-tongued bumblebees.

















Photos Getty, Alamy, GAP, Science Photo Library



An opportunistic hunter with a flying speed of 30–40kph, the sparrowhawk is a master of the swift manoeuvre in pursuit. Here, a female sparrowhawk stretches out to capture a coal tit in mid-flight

Photo: Alamy

DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON...

As we're spending more time watching our gardens, we're very likely to witness one of the most dashing killers of the bird world at work. **Tim Dee** introduces a master of ambush: the sparrowhawk

You will have seen this or know someone who has. There – on the back lawn of your house, or in a neighbour's driveway, or on the pavement down towards the local shop, or under the big trees by the pond in the park – it was there, suddenly noticed, unexpectedly close, a bird of prey standing on another bird, hungrily gazing down at the upturned breast beneath it like a victorious fighter on a vanquished body, a pocket-sized carnivore caught in the middle of its murderous business. Just there, such shockingly wild life so close to home!

The bird on top is a sparrowhawk. Sometimes the underling can be twice the size of the raptor trying to eat it. It is like watching David fight Goliath – victory isn't guaranteed. But the hawk's thrillingly cold eyes imply that it will prevail.



ABOVE A male sparrowhawk fastens a stock dove in a deathly grip and mantles its wings, ready to feed

On half a dozen occasions in 50 birdwatching years I have witnessed such protracted slayings; each time, I've had the sensation of intruding on a malevolent hypnosis or a very unhappy seance. The hawk appears to be trying to psych up its prey to death.

The male sparrowhawk I saw one afternoon last winter, trying to finish off a wood pigeon in the middle of the road outside my home in Bristol, was not much bigger than a thrush, but, along with its mustard-yellow eyes, it had a bone-bright beak and long, strong, scaly legs. All spoke of the hawk's tenacity: it would out-stare what was beneath it and hang on to its dinner like grim death. And as it lowered its beak towards the breast of the dumbstruck pigeon, I could also see its talons clawing through the more than ruffled feathers of its prey. That prey, it was horrible to realise, was a bird still alive: a wood pigeon that day, or, on other occasions, a town pigeon, or the male blackbird of what was – no! – half of the pair in my garden, or a great-spotted woodpecker aghast at being pinned to a lawn, or a starling screaming back at those killer eyes and that beak so keen to begin eating.

"The sparrowhawk mantles its quarry, spreading its grey wings like a sinister cloak"

It's like stumbling into quite the wrong film at the multiplex. The sparrowhawk mantles its quarry, spreading its grey wings like a sinister cloak. Lowering its beak, it plucks at breast feathers, searching through them for edible material. It tears out a bite-sized bloody fillet and, while the starling screams again or the wood pigeon forlornly windmills its wings, the hawk begins to eat, happy with its meat very rare, not caring that the donor of the cut is still alive and kicking.

BACK-GARDEN BLOODLETTING

Such gore in our domestic precincts is certainly an eye-opener, and today we are seeing it more and more. Sparrowhawks are absent from only the most mountainous areas of Britain and are now more widespread and common than they have been for centuries. There are 35,000 breeding pairs. Wherever you live, there will be a sparrowhawk nearby.

The species started out as forest birds, feeding in clearings and at woodland fringes. Now they have found those rich ecotones (there is commonly more life at the edges of habitats than at their heart) are amply replicated in town gardens and city parks. And, because they are occupying built-up areas like never before, many of us town and city-dwelling citizens will have had opportunities to observe a sparrowhawk neighbour on the hunt or enforcing a lockdown with its prey. It seems likely, too, that our recent confinement to our homes

IS IT A SPARROWHAWK, A GOSHAWK, OR A BUZZARD?

1 Eurasian sparrowhawk
In open-sky hunting, this is often seen making a succession of flaps and glides. In ambush, it is fast and furious, often hugging close to the ground or keeping to cover afforded by vegetation. Males (pictured) are petite, with a small head, rounded wings and a long tail, slate-grey upperparts and brown-barred off-white underparts. Females are paler and can be much larger, heavier, bulkier, and more powerful; they can be confused with goshawks.

2 Northern goshawk
A supersized sparrowhawk. This forest bird is commoner than it appears, and not urban in Britain (although it is found in many German cities and elsewhere). A heavy-duty genius of stealthy pursuit, it is best seen during early-spring display flights. It eats birds as big as a capercaillie and mammals as big as hares. Overall, it looks colder than a sparrowhawk: frosted-grey above, with birch-tree barring beneath, a white eye-stripe and often a distinctive powder-snow lower belly and undertail. One hell of a hunter, it's prized by falconers.

3 Common buzzard
The buzzard is a lummox in comparison with either hawk. Much more conspicuous, it soars freely, but uses little speed in hunting, often pouncing after having perched in the open, scanning the ground below. It takes carrion and invertebrates as well as live prey. It has very variable plumage but, broadly, a more earthy brown above, which is blotchier and less barred below. Rounded wings sometimes show fingers at their tips; and the broad tail is often spread in soaring flight.

Photos RSPB Images, Alamy, Getty


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LEFT This composite image shows how a sparrowhawk targets prey on a bird feeder **ABOVE** Keeping watch on a birdtable

will have increased such encounters. Sparrowhawks feed almost entirely on birds. Most other British raptors are not so bird-obsessed. We are familiar with their hunting techniques: kestrels hover (scanning for small mammals); buzzards soar (as well as plodding after earthworms and eating roadkill); red kites wheel and dip (in back gardens too, though not often for living food). Sparrowhawks are more furtive. Kitted out with relatively short and rounded wings, ambush is their métier: secrecy and stealth and surprise.

With visual acuity as much as eight times that of humans and unusually keen perception of distance and movement, sparrowhawks can operate in tight corners in ways that amaze anyone lucky enough to catch a glimpse of an attack. They flummox our sight as much as they fluster anything that they pursue. They hedge-hop and hug the ground, they appear able to fly, at speed, through trees, and they literally burst from within bushes.

CONVENIENCE FOOD

Having moved into places built and fashioned by humans, the hawks have headed for the greatest concentration of bird-prey: garden birdtables. Today, the word has taken on a new meaning: for sparrowhawks, feeding stations are sushi counters or meat smorgasbords or butcher's blocks. Great tits, chaffinches, starlings, blackbirds – all are commonly snatched from their own dining to become a hawk takeaway. Sparrowhawks will also tackle larger portions, pigeons especially. And, happy to live by their name, they are also fond of sparrow. Or they were, before the British house sparrow population crashed.

On that sad subject, the sparrowhawk has been accused of the mass-murder of small birds. There is no evidence to support such a belief (see box, right), which is most likely a prejudice left over from the era of intensive gamekeeping in the countryside. However, most observers, me included, would agree that sparrowhawks do have an air of being particularly hungry hunters. They will even eat one another: males, which are always smaller and regularly half the size of females (for evolutionarily useful reasons of dividing nesting and chick-rearing duties and diversifying food sources), have been seen killed and eaten by their very own breeding partners.

A hawk's gotta hunt though, and no bird of prey lives the life of a predator and defines that word so vividly as a sparrowhawk. Look out for one today – they'll be on the prowl close by. I saw one just yesterday; my local supermarket attracts a flutter of pigeons to its roof and at least once a day these birds are freaked into a headache of anxious flight when a female sparrowhawk passes. She looks to me like nothing more than a smudge at the edge of the sky, but the pigeons, doing their best to look over their shoulders as they fly, know better. That smudge is picking up speed, intent on murder. CF



Tim Dee's most recent book is *Greenery: Journeys in Springtime* (Jonathan Cape). He also edited *The Poetry of Birds* with Simon Armitage (Penguin).



CRUEL KILLER?

In 32 days of observation of a sparrowhawk nest, the male brought an average of 10 passerine birds each day to the female and their growing chicks. In part because of facts like this (sparrowhawks do kill a lot of small, often garden-familiar, birds), and in part because of the hawks' perceived cunning that allows them – like stoats and weasels – to jinx their victims and often to tackle disproportionately large prey species, the raptor has been arraigned by some. It is believed the bird has got out of hand and has now become unnaturally murderous and improperly successful. Even the RSPB has posted suggestions on how to deter sparrowhawks from raiding your birdtable.

The belief has been tested and found not true. Beginning a comeback in the 1970s, having suffered a grievous decline in post-war Britain due to widespread agricultural use of DDT and other persistent and poisonous organochlorines, the species recolonised areas of the country that have since seen big declines in small birds. However, the newish presence of sparrowhawks has been proven not to be a determining factor in those passerine losses; changes in farming practices have been much more detrimental.

Meanwhile, the massive overproduction of young birds every breeding season (a great tit might fledge 12 or more chicks) coincides with the sparrowhawks' greatest need (they time their breeding to hit such bird gluts). Long-term population trends are neither being skewed nor skewered by the hawk.

Photos RSPB Images, Alamy, Naturepl.com



Summer SPECTACULAR

'We look forward to welcoming visitors to Exmoor when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, enjoy some Exmoor inspiration'

Summer in Exmoor is truly a sight to behold. Strokes of rich, lush green paint everything from the beech hedges to the moors, and bursts of pink and purple cut through the greenery as the heather preens under the sun. Enjoy these beautiful views on horseback over the hills, then escape the heat on the coast and hire a kayak or a stand-up paddle board. This three-day itinerary gives you a taste of the magnificence of Exmoor. As our businesses reopen, we look forward to welcoming you to beautiful Exmoor. When planning your visit to the area, please always follow Government guidance..

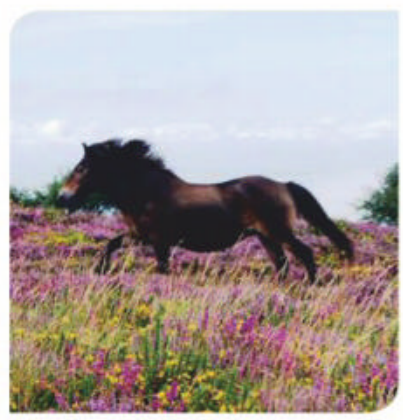
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DAY 1

Start the first day of your Exmoor summer trip with a ride on the Lynton and Lynmouth Cliff Railway. Once you reach the top of the cliffs, you not only get to enjoy the sun-soaked views, but also a delectable cream tea. You could top that off with a climb up the Valley of Rocks, before heading back down to the beautiful harbour at Lynmouth.



DAY 2

The second day is for meeting the wild ponies on the high moors of Porlock – and marvelling at the magnificent coastal views along the way. A delicious lunch overlooking the tranquil sea at Porlock Weir will remind you of your childhood holidays, while a picturesque drive to quaint village Dunster will take you back to the Middle Ages.



DAY 3

A day for meandering the blissfully uncrowded streets of Exmoor's villages, then driving high up on the moors and over to clapper bridge Tarr Steps for a picnic. Too warm after soaking up the sun? Take a dip in the river before making your way to Dulverton. The lovely town has plenty of independent shops and local restaurants along the high street.

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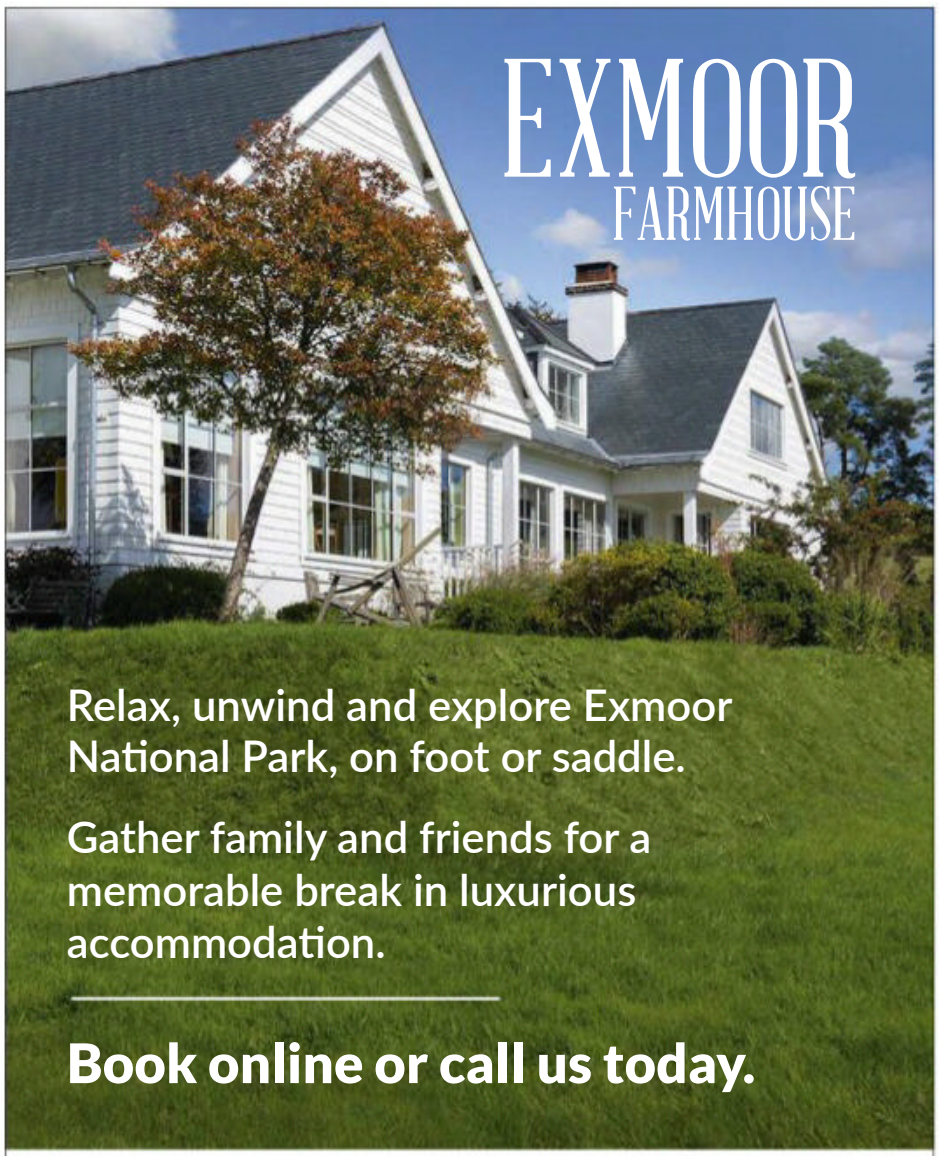
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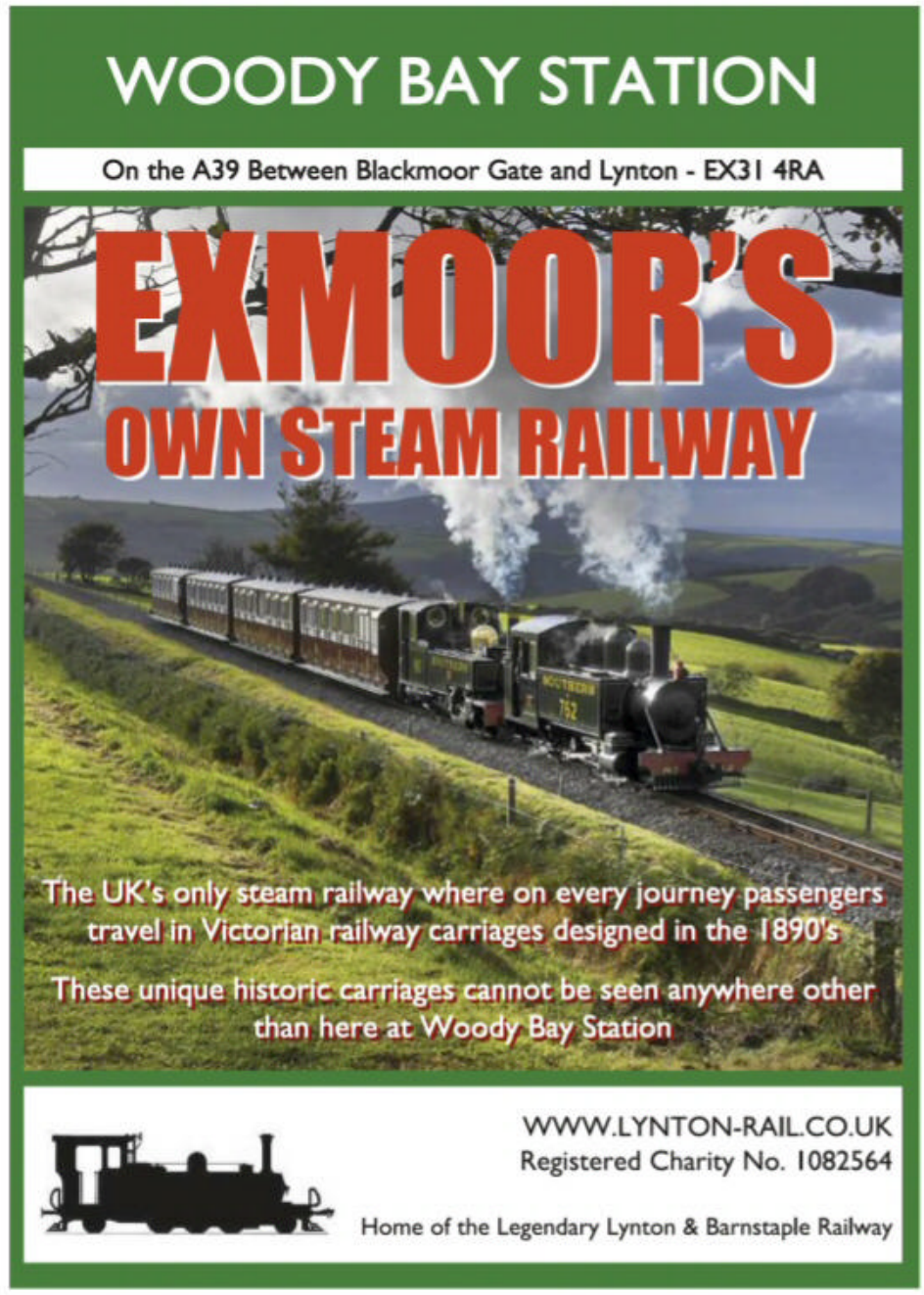



Image: Shutterstock

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On a balmy July day in 1935, it's tea time for a family holidaying in a camping coach, just a short walk from Southminster station in Essex **TOP RIGHT** In the 1930s, iconic posters for London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) advertised the delights of camping coaches

First-class fun

It was exciting, cheap and adventurous – a few days in an old train carriage, parked in beautiful countryside. Historian **Kathryn Ferry** celebrates the heyday of the camping coach, and discovers that you can still stay on a train today

Photos: Getty





Glamping may feel like a very 21st-century phenomenon but the idea of camping-made-easy has actually been around for more than 100 years.

During the 1890s, people started buying up old railway carriages to convert them into seaside holiday homes, and from 1933 the railway companies themselves began to exploit this trend. In that year, London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) launched its first camping coaches, a facility, it said, that could just as easily be dubbed "camping deluxe".

British leisure habits witnessed real change in the 1930s as rising living standards allowed more people to take an annual holiday. Alongside this was a new appreciation of healthy living and outdoor activities. It was the decade when the Youth Hostelling Association was founded and sunbathing became fashionable. Rambling, hiking and cycling proved popular ways of working on a tan, as did a visit to the open-air pool or lido.

At the seaside, traditional landladies had competition from new holiday camps. Whereas these gloried in communal entertainment, sport and games, camping coaches offered a more peaceful, do-it-yourself experience. According to *The Yorkshire Post* in June 1934, "the idea caught on tremendously, and the instant popularity surprised even some of the sponsors of the scheme". The LNER received 6,000 booking applications for 1935, although they only had 65 converted coaches available over the 25-week season. Four years later, and with all four British railway companies







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP In June 1936 in Essex, Brightlingsea's station master delivers the mail right to the door of Mrs Jennings' camping coach; a rooftop party with a sea view in Sandsend, North Yorkshire, in the same year; lunch is served in the coach

operating their own camping coaches, the nationwide total was 434. These were located to suit "all diversities of tastes, be it seaside, dale, lake or Highland".

SLEEPING ON THE SIDINGS

In quiet sidings up and down the country, lone passenger carriages became a familiar site. Fitted out with bedrooms, living space and a kitchen, the standard camping coach slept six for a weekly charge of £2 10s, including bedding, crockery and cutlery. Although holidaymakers had a proper roof over their heads, it was still glorified camping. Cooking had to be done on a Primus stove, the coaches were lit by oil lamps and water had to be fetched in jugs from the station, which was also the location of the only loo!

Yet even along the most isolated stretches of branch line, campers were never entirely alone and if they needed anything, the station master was there to help. Rosemary Timms was a young girl when her extended family holidayed in camping coaches around Talsarnau on the Welsh coast during the 1950s.

"The station master was a Mr Hughes and he was always there to greet us," recalled Rosemary. "When we arrived he'd arrange for a box of groceries to be waiting in the kitchen, which included treats we wouldn't normally get at home, like Puffed Wheat! The coach overlooked the sea, which was lovely."

It was a big change from everyday life in industrial Lancashire, and Mr Hughes' local knowledge helped the family make the most of the surrounding countryside.

Picturesque locations came as standard when you stayed in a camping coach. The coastal line north of Scarborough proved a particular hotspot; in 1957, there were six parked at Sandsend, with five each at Robin Hood's Bay and Scalby. The 15 coaches at Blackpool provided cheap accommodation at the north's favourite resort, but this concentration was unique. Although large families or groups of friends could pick a place that had two or three coaches, the single sites were more common, scattered throughout Wales, Scotland and the West Country.

Wherever you stayed, it was likely that each day would be punctuated by the sound and smell of passing trains. Even if you weren't a hardened 'loco spotter', it was thrilling to wave at drivers and passengers. When the Royal Mail train passed, you could hand over your postcards and watch them speed off to relations back home.



ABOVE Train companies employed artists such as Frank Newbould to create eye-catching posters promoting camping coach holidays in idyllic waterside locations

> ***"Cooking had to be done on a Primus and coaches were lit by oil lamps"***

Though camping coaches had their heyday from the 1930s to the 1960s, some remained well after that and Gary Jones has fond memories of staying at Dawlish Warren in Devon.

"We first went in 1975 then every summer until 1982. My father worked for British Rail so it was very much a busman's holiday. I loved it and ended up on the railway too."

Often the occupants of camping coaches were railway families, as workers could stay at a discount and travel free on the trains.

"MY HOLIDAYS"

Some of Ruth Kirk's earliest memories relate to camping coaches: "I was born in 1952 and must have been pretty young when my family first went, because I clearly remember my mother pinning me into my camping coach bed with safety pins so I wouldn't fall out. About a month before each holiday she would pack a huge tin trunk with everything we needed so this could be sent ahead. We always stayed at quiet, rural stations where the coaches were surrounded by long grass,



bushes and weeds. As the sidings had no platform, and trains are quite high up off the ground, we boarded via wooden steps. Inside, all the lampshades and pictures remained in place from when the carriage was in active service."

Photos Getty, Alamy



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
At Wargrave in Berkshire, holidaymakers set off from their home on wheels to fetch vital water supplies; a family makes the most of their camping coach in this 1948 British Pathé film; a GWR publicity snap of cosy coach camping

CHANGE ROLLS DOWN THE LINE

Unsurprisingly, changes on the rail network affected the availability of camping coaches. The Second World War put holidays on hold, but the peacetime rush back to the coast kept demand high, and in 1948 British Pathé made a promotional film that offers a lovely glimpse inside a post-war camping coach. Available online, it shows a mother pottering about a kitchen equipped with proper china and basic cooking facilities and the whole family lined up on the original train seat, happy doing nothing in their "paradise in a railway siding".

That same year, the railways were nationalised and, following an overhaul, camping coaches were relaunched in 1952. From 1960, converted Pullman coaches introduced a new level of comfort to the fleet; Corfe Castle had two and another went to Mundesley-on-Sea in Norfolk.

When Dr Beeching's axe fell on Britain's branch lines, there was no specific plan for the future of camping coaches. However, his first report in 1963 recommended the closure of 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles of track. Many of the 125 coach sites advertised in 1957 simply ceased to be accessible and the friendly station master was rapidly consigned to history.

The nation's holiday habits were also changing. Package deals to foreign sunshine became more affordable and, just as importantly, Britons were taking to the road. For families who had once enjoyed "delightful inexpensive holidays" in a camping coach, the alternative of their own car and caravan promised greater freedom with all the home comforts. But the camping coach never completely disappeared, and you can still take a break in this quirky accommodation today. CF



Kathryn Ferry is a historian who loves to be beside the seaside. She is the author of books on beach huts, bungalows and Butlin's. Her latest book *Seaside 100: A History of the British Seaside in 100 Objects* (Unicorn Publishing) is out now.



Blue Anchor Bay



Loch Awe

STAY IN A CAMPING COACH

1. The restored 100-year-old camping coach at **Blue Anchor Bay**, Somerset, is right by the beach and the West Somerset Railway. **britishrailholidays.co.uk**

2. Wake up beside Scotland's longest inland loch in a camping coach at **Loch Awe**. Sleeps five; available April to November. **scotlandrailholiday.com**

3. On the main line from London are four camping coaches in the Cornish village of **St Germans**, with a fifth near the beach at **Hayle**. Dog-friendly and accessible options. **railholiday.co.uk/index.htm**

4. The Old Station at **Petworth**, West Sussex, has been converted into an award-winning B&B with eight ensuite rooms available in glamorous former Pullman coaches. **old-station.co.uk**

5. In Shropshire's historic Ironbridge Gorge, the two camping coaches at **Coalport** offer modern self-catering accommodation close to the River Severn. **coalportstation.com**

6. A beautiful Victorian carriage near **Netherbury**, Dorset, High Cross Camping Coach sleeps two with space for two more in an adjacent van. **campingcoach.co.uk**

7. Enjoy steam trains on the North York Moors Railway while staying in a camping coach at **Goathland** or **Levisham** stations – great bases to explore the national park. **nymr.co.uk/goathland-camping-coach**

Photos: Getty, British Pathe

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COUNTRYFILE ISSUES

JOHN CRAVEN

USING PEAT IN GARDENS THREATENS PRECIOUS WETLANDS

They've been called the UK's version of the rainforests because of the diversity of their rare and endangered wildlife and their ability – so vital in the battle against climate change – to soak up significant amounts of harmful carbon. But just like the rainforests, our peatlands are in big trouble.

They cover 12% of the nation's land area, yet less than a quarter of them are classic undrained bogs and fens; many others are damaged or degraded and can actually emit greenhouse gases rather than store them. The cost of reversing that to help meet climate-change targets would run into billions. Yet extracting peat from 'healthy' bogs and selling it as compost to gardeners and the horticultural industry still goes on, despite pleas from both government and conservationists for it to stop. Much of it is imported from Ireland and eastern Europe but I'm told that almost a third – that's many thousands of tonnes over the years – comes from our own wetlands.

In 2011, DEFRA set a target of 2020 for gardeners to phase out peat voluntarily. Nine years is ample time, you might think, for suppliers to get organised. But that deadline has been missed. People anxious to stock up their gardens after the lifting of some coronavirus restrictions will have seen peat-based products piled high when they shop.

Now, the botanical charity Plantlife (its own 1,238 hectares of protected bog in the Flow Country of Northern Scotland traps two million tonnes of carbon) is calling for an immediate and outright ban on extraction. Policy manager Jenny Hawley tells me: "The Government's failure to meet its target is not only lamentable but also entirely inconsistent with its purported ambition to act as a world leader on climate. If we are to get serious about tackling the climate emergency, we must keep peat in the ground not the growbag," she adds. "Domestic gardening accounts for 69% of peat compost used in the UK and if we all commit to going peat-free now – even if the Government won't – we can pave the way towards a brighter future for the remaining peatlands and their exquisite carpets of mosses, cotton grasses, bog asphodel, sundews, cuckooflower and marsh violet."



Extracting peat has a negative knock-on effect on local wildlife, flood risk and water quality, as well as our carbon stores

DEFRA has also set another target: professional growers of fruit, vegetables and plants have been told to stop using peat by 2030, or else.

GROWING DEMAND

Finding substitutes in which to grow everything from mushrooms to flowers is a huge challenge. James Clark of the Horticultural Trades Association says the industry has already made significant progress in reducing reliance on peat and developing alternatives. On the home gardening front, James says customers are increasingly demanding sustainability. "Many more peat-reduced ranges were going to be on offer for the 2020 gardening season prior to the impact of Covid-19."

DEFRA says that when current extraction licences come to an end in England, no more will be issued and it's working with the industry to make the transition from peat simpler. But then comes this warning: "We have been clear that we will consider further measures, including a ban, to end the use of peat."

There is, of course, a cheap and positive solution: make your own compost heap with a 50/50 mix of nitrogen and carbon. Nitrogen comes from green materials, such as veg and fruit peelings and grass clippings, and carbon from brown materials, such as shredded woody stems, crumpled paper and egg boxes. You'll save money – and the peatbogs.

Watch John on *Countryfile*, Sunday evenings on BBC One.

Photo: Alamy

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

DAIRY CRISIS

The dairy industry – including farmers, producers and processors of milk, cheese and butter – has faced huge pressures during the Covid-19 crisis. Wildly fluctuating prices and demand, as well as payment delays, mean the sector may look very different as the country emerges from lockdown. **Mark Rowe** investigates

WHAT ARE THE MAIN PROBLEMS?



Production
This has dropped by around two million litres a day during lockdown – a 6% drop. "Things have settled down since the first three weeks of lockdown and we have seen a decent uplift in most dairy products," says Chris Gooderham at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

Drop in demand
"We had one week of panic buying but the lull and drop in demand that followed really hurt processors," says Gooderham. Around 10% of milk produced is usually bought by cafés, schools and caterers, which were all closed.

At the outbreak's peak, staff absenteeism was also an issue for milk producers.





Late payments
"Farmers have been told processors will pay them later, or pay less," says Michael Oakes, NFU dairy spokesman. "It's causing huge cash-flow problems. It has affected family farms and the larger, more commercial operations." Some 500–700 farmers have had a 'significant' reduction in demand for milk or had payments deferred.

Decline in exports
Oakes says some countries that take UK milk powder, such as Vietnam and China, have reduced their demand. "The problem we face is that this is a problem around the world – farmers everywhere are facing the same issues, so there is nowhere to turn to shift the product."





Price falls
Before lockdown, farm-gate prices for milk were 28p per litre, and close to the five-year average. The AHDB says 12% of farmers have been highly impacted, with price cuts of more than 2p a litre and severe cash-flow problems – 14% have been moderately impacted and 48% slightly impacted.

"The price of milk dropped to just 5p a litre in April, though it has since risen to 10–15p. The break-even cost for a farmer is around 28p a litre" Source: ADHD

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE SHORT TERM?

The NFU has called for Government support. "Not only can you not furlough a cow, you cannot furlough staff because there is animal husbandry to take care of," says Michael Oakes. "You can't put the dairy industry into hibernation for three months and expect it to come out the other side. The Government needs to step in with some kind of hardship fund, as they have for fisheries and other sectors of the economy." In the medium term, prices for cheeses, cream and butter are expected to fall further, says the AHDB. "The impact on consumers, especially the self-employed, has been severe," adds Gooderham. "The question is not only when restaurants will reopen but if people have the money to spend in them."



“In early April, more than one million litres of milk were thrown away on farm fields, with another one million litres disposed of in factories” Source: NFU/ADHD

THROWING IT AWAY

More than one million litres of milk have been thrown away on farm fields, causing nutrient contamination and groundwater pollution, and another one million litres disposed of in factories. This mainly occurred in the second and third week of lockdown when panic buying calmed down, leading to oversupply. “Producers were asking people to take it away for free,” says Gooderham.

Producers for Freshways were forced to dispose of milk in slurry lagoons after the company told farmers at short notice that farm collections would be delayed. “Some farmers have had to take desperate measures,” says the NFU’s Oakes. In other cases, milk has been taken to anaerobic digestion plants and used to generate energy. The NFU and AHDB have also reported farmers drying off their cows, which means the animal can’t produce milk until it calves. “That is not something you can just turn on like a tap when you want to produce more milk,” says Gooderham.





THE RETURN OF THE LOCAL DOORSTEP DELIVERY

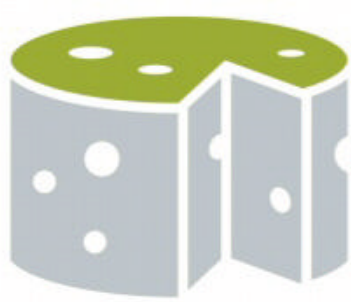
Up and down the country, doorstep milk deliveries have burgeoned. James Durose, of Raglan Dairy in Monmouthshire, says his dairy is no exception. Demand has increased by 35% and is “booming”, as increasing numbers of people across the county turn to doorstep deliveries. “Many people are stuck in their own homes or cannot get supermarket deliveries, so we have seen a big jump in demand,” he says. While the dairy lost orders to the restaurant trade and its contract to supply school milk was put on hold, this has been more than compensated for by increased household demand. “People are using us who never knew we existed,” he says. Like many other milkmen and women, Durose delivers not just local milk but fruit yoghurts, Welsh buttermilk, butter, free-range eggs and local organic apple juice.

While some customers will return to old habits, Durose believes the world before lockdown is not coming back. “People have woken up to a world beyond supermarkets and are more aware of key workers and the supply chains we’ve kept going. They’ve noticed that we, the baker, the butcher, have been open and had everything they need over the past few weeks. I don’t think they’ll forget that.”

CHEESE

Cheddar is one market that has held up “quite well”, according to Oakes at the NFU. “Processors stockpiled Cheddar ahead of a no-deal Brexit, so that has come in useful as it has really flown off the shelves.”

More specialist cheese producers may face an uncertain future, suggests Oakes. “Before lockdown, 50% of specialist cheeses were eaten in the house, the other half outside – in restaurants, on cheeseboards in pubs. Now it is all at home. The other 50% just isn’t happening for those regional names such as Wensleydale, Cheshire or Stilton.”





FUTURE

Even before Covid-19, the NFU had warned there could be fewer than 5,000 dairy farmers left in the UK by 2025. “We need to improve the recognition for dairy farmers – for all farmers,” says Oakes. “They need to have better contracts, and Covid-19 will bring this to a head. You wouldn’t tell Microsoft that you won’t pay them as much as was promised, or pay later than agreed, but we’ve allowed that to happen to those who produce our food. The risk needs to be shared more equitably and not all placed on farmers. Farmers need to make a profit – they don’t look to make big profits but if they can’t make any money they will move on to something else.”

“There may well be casualties,” says Gooderham (AHDB). “If farmers don’t have the cashflow and they have to pay bills, some will not survive. The industry needs to work out where it has been vulnerable, where it is strong and what it can do more of – products with long shelf lives, cheeses, powders are more in demand,” adds Gooderham. “The big processors – Arla and Müller – will be doing that right now. The question is whether the smaller players can, too.”

Have your say? What do you think about the issues raised here? Write to the address on page three or email **editor@countryfile.com**

Photos Getty

DOORSTEP DISCOVERIES

Unable to explore the wider outdoors during the Covid-19 lockdown, the *BBC Countryfile Magazine* team has been looking for the countryside closer to home. Here's what we found...

This magazine exists to explore the countryside with its readers, so the recent lockdown has been a particular challenge. At *BBC Countryfile Magazine*, we've had to find ways to make the features relevant at a time when none of us has been allowed to travel. And we know our readers have also found the loss of freedom to travel and enjoy this most beautiful of springs very hard, especially those living in a city.

As a team, we're all passionate about the great outdoors, wildlife, beautiful landscapes, the enchanting villages and historic sites that make every day out an adventure. But, like you, we've been forced to focus our attention on our local streets and green areas for months at a time. It's been hard. But it has also been a revelation: all of us have made discoveries within 10 minutes of our homes. We've been able to spend time noticing the small things, watching the season unfurl and finding breathing space at a difficult time.

I hope you enjoy – and are inspired by – the following mini-stories. And we hope that when the threat of Covid-19 recedes, we all remember the importance of green spaces, wildlife and the wonder of our landscapes for our mental and physical wellbeing.



RIVER VISTA, BRISTOL

Daniel Graham, section editor

Since moving to east Bristol about a year ago, I have spent many evenings and weekends exploring the local parks, paths and reserves, in particular those surrounding the River Avon a few minutes from my house. I thought I knew the banks of this watercourse well – the heronry in East Wood, the kingfisher perches – but over the past few weeks, with a little more time to explore, I've realised just how much remains to be discovered. I've found myself straying from familiar ways and, as a result, have made some astonishing discoveries, the most poignant of which was a viewpoint at the lip of the valley in Conham River Park. I'd never seen the Avon from this angle before and it has altered my perspective of the river forever. On your next walk, make a point of turning down a road or footpath you've not explored before – you never know what you might find.



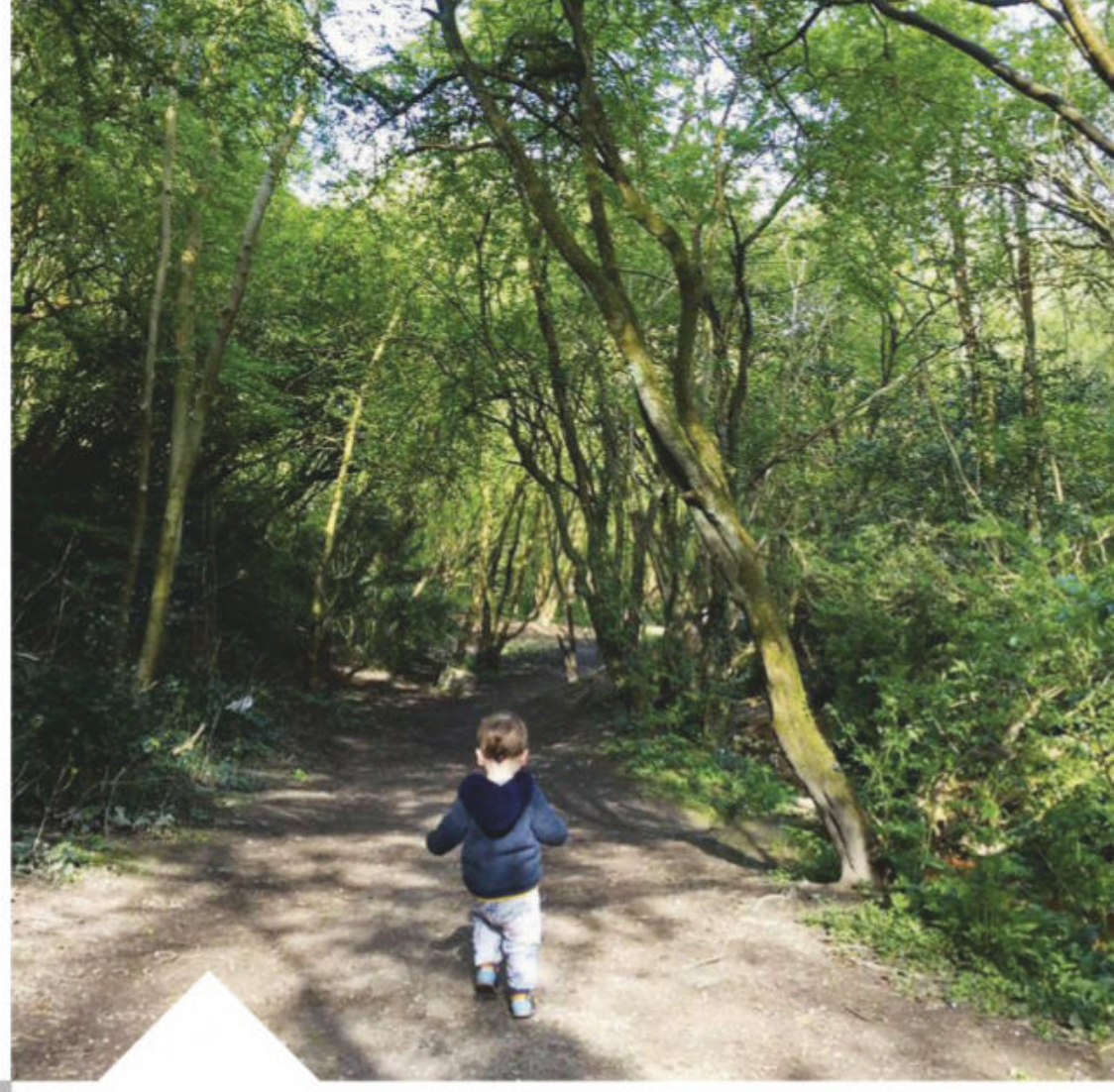
MINNOW RESCUE, ABERGAVENNY

Fergus Collins, editor

The biggest discovery of the recent weeks has been understanding the importance of taking a second look. Local lanes and footpaths I've normally dismissed as rather mundane have thrown up a number of amazing surprises as I've had the time to see the changing of the season and notice small things. For example, a dark unpromising roadside pond that I'd always dismissed as a polluted hole turned out to have a shoal of shimmering fish. And so did the ditches along the lane. Thousands of fish that had become trapped after the recent floods – some of them quite sizeable. My son and I indulged in hours of pond dipping that rekindled a childhood hunting fever that I long thought buried.

As the weather warmed, the water began to dry out, so we launched a rescue mission and returned hundreds of chub and minnows to the nearby river before they all suffocated.

You cannot overestimate the lucky-dip joys of pond-dipping. Invest in a good net (try **nhbs.com**) and look after what you catch.







THE ENCHANTED WOOD, BRISTOL

Maria Hodson, production editor

From our small house in Easton, Bristol, I navigate my son's buggy along deserted streets. Our typical outing of playground and café belongs to another life. Instead, we walk along the local bike path and veer off past green rugby fields blooming with daisies, buttercups and dandelions. A thicket of trees appears ahead, with a small gap in the railings. The gravel path descends to Coombe Brook Valley – a shady woodland of hazel, oak and sycamore, where a stream burbles between banks blooming with wild garlic. Much to my toddler's delight, a small wooden bridge crosses the brook. We pick up twigs and lob them into the water below. The trunk of a fallen tree becomes a picnic bench; its long limbs a climbing frame. As we wander the paths, my son points out pine cones, yellow catkins, a tortoiseshell butterfly and the deep coos of a wood pigeon. He stomps through mud and studiously inspects sticks. We now call this modest reserve "the enchanted wood", as it appeared just when we most needed nature's magic.



WATER VOLE SIGHTING, SWINDON

Hilary Clothier, picture editor

Being on lockdown in a town on the doorstep of the closed Wiltshire countryside has been frustrating – however, I've found some local gems that I can quietly visit first thing in the morning to enjoy the flora and fauna at its best. The warm sunshine and lack of footfall seems to have allowed the local wildlife to rediscover its home environment without interruption and really work up some spring fever.

One early morning I was walking along the Wilts and Berks Canal path watching robins whizz in and out of the hedgerow when I spotted a water vole casually sitting on the bankside by its burrow. Keeping my distance, I tried very quietly to take its photograph, but sadly it spotted me and scurried away before I could capture the image (so we have used a library shot instead). That was the first time I'd seen a water vole so close and I felt very privileged to have shared its morning moment. It was certainly a wonderful experience I won't forget, and a good memory to take away from these difficult times.

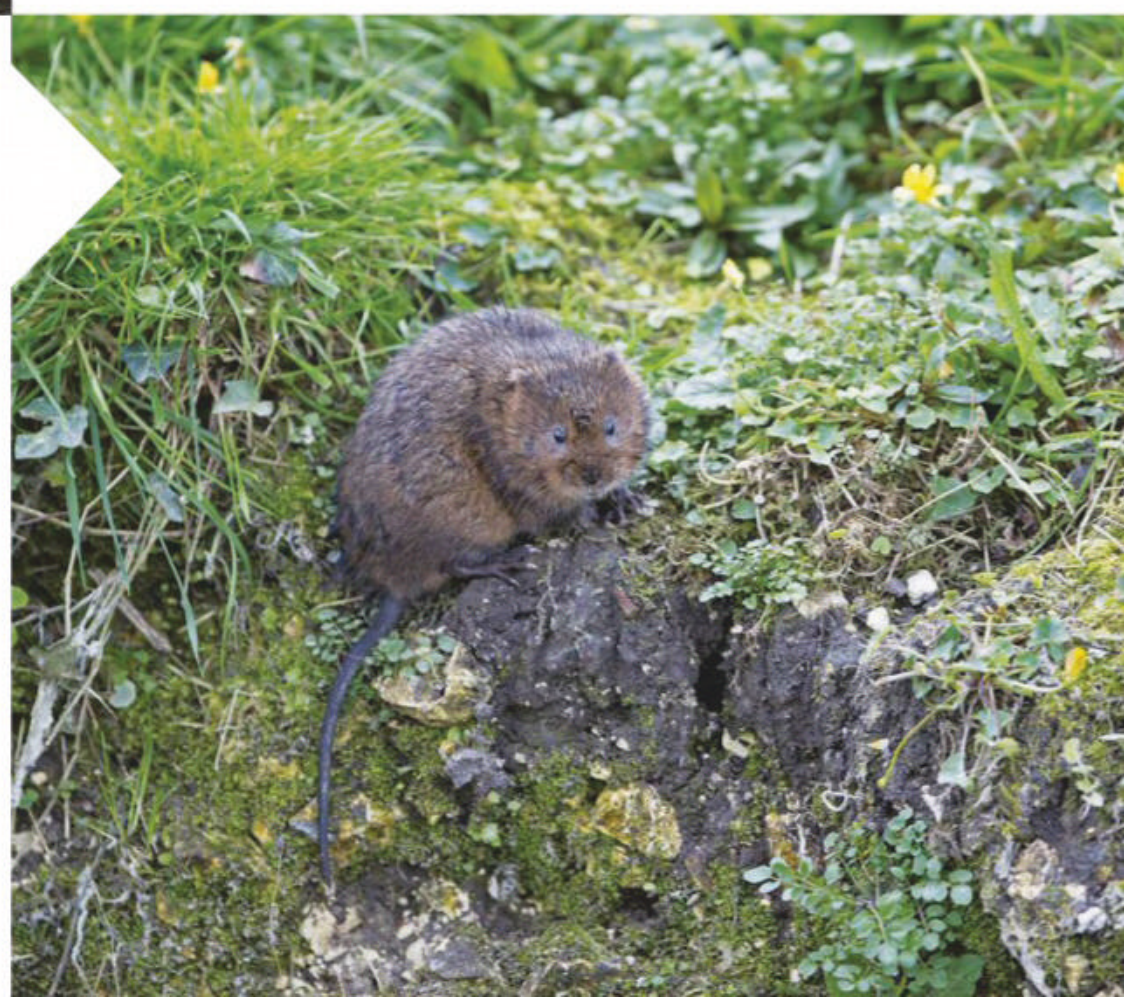
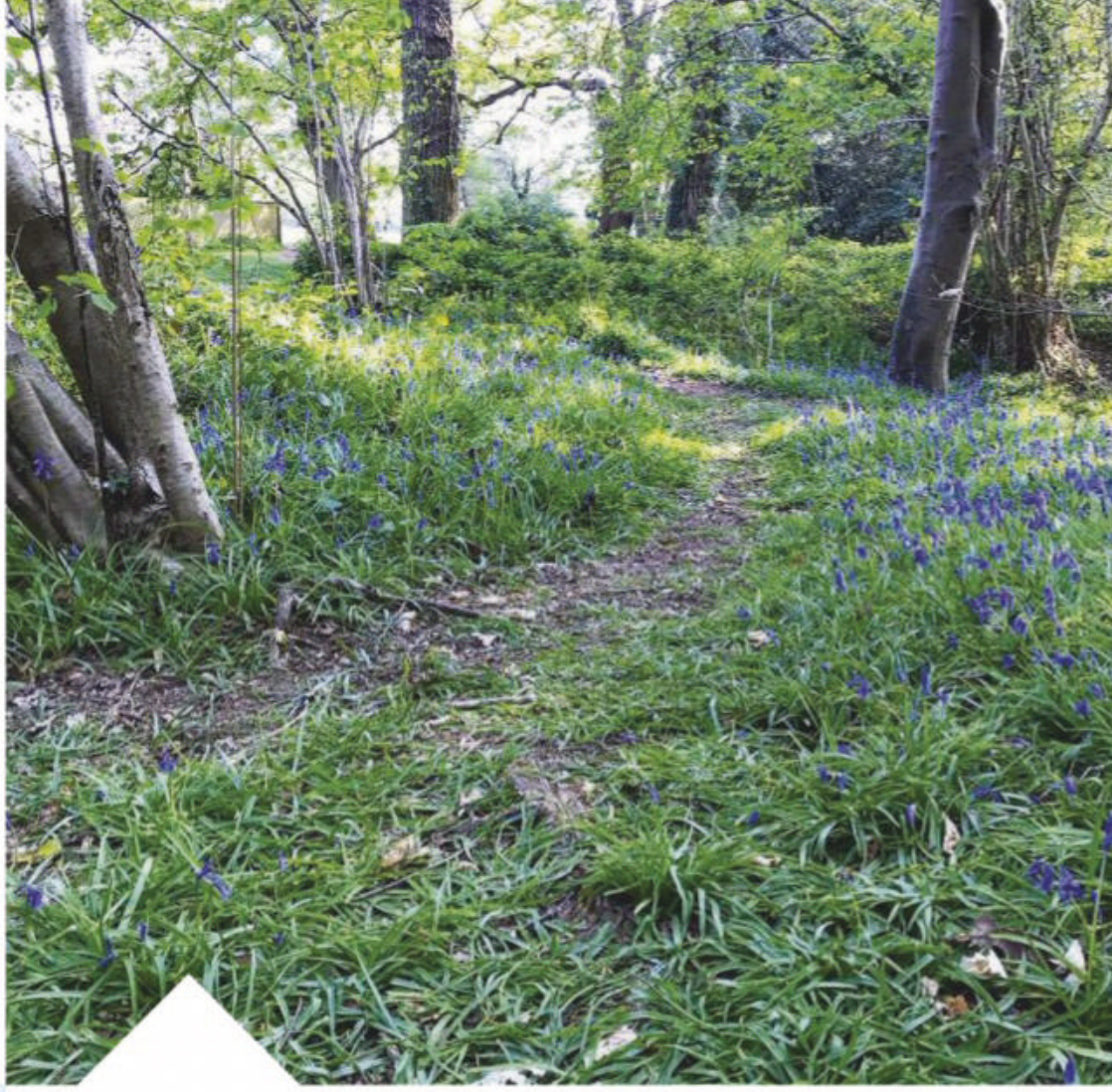


Photo Getty





THE QUIET QUARRY, SOMERSET

Joe Pontin, features editor

Quarries, like other industrial sites, may not sound instantly promising places to seek out the wild and tranquil; they carry an air of peril. Those near my Somerset home are sensibly fenced off to keep people safely away from their precipices and other hazards. But these great gouges in the landscape are often fringed with woods. Once private, many of the woodlands are now open to the public. Volunteers have been busy laying new paths through the trees and making micro-habitats for wildlife: thinning out the ash and sycamore to bring light to the woodland floor, digging ponds and restoring meadows. Orchids bloom and overhead, buzzards make their lonely cry; by night the woods are alive with snouting badgers, and the quarry echoes with owl calls.

All around the UK, former industrial sites and their margins – canals, former mines and railway lines – have been turned into green spaces like this. To find one near you, go to **wildlifetrusts.org/visit**.





BUTTERCUP BLISS, BRISTOL

Carys Matthews, countryfile.com digital editor

At the start of lockdown the landscape still felt wintry, and it was very muddy underfoot on my local running route in Bristol's Stoke Park. Despite sitting on the edge of the M32, this beautiful park is an urban wildlife gem, with the lower meadows and ponds attracting butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. At the top of the park sits Purdown Tower, where I enjoy pausing mid-run to appreciate one of the best views of the surrounding countryside.

My favourite running route connects several of East Bristol's green spaces and I never tire of running through leafy Oldbury Court and along the River Frome in Snuffmills towards the lush meadows of Frenchay Moor. In the last two and a half months, the seasons have changed and in recent weeks I've heard more birdsong than ever before, foraged for wild garlic and paused to appreciate the view across a buttercup-filled meadow that I never knew even existed. Enjoying these little moments in nature has been a calming tonic during this strange time.



POND DIPPING, CHIPPING SODBURY

Tim Bates, art editor

As parents to two young boys, our normal lives are hectic, so lockdown has given us a chance to really slow down and appreciate our local area. We've made lots of new discoveries as a family, our favourite being the local golf course – no shouts of "fore!" but a peaceful wildlife haven. We saw jays, woodpeckers, rabbits and squirrels, but the most fun was found by the water hazards. Four large pools teemed with life, with coots patrolling through reedbeds and damselflies hovering around beautiful iris blooms. The boys' favourites were the tadpoles – hours were spent waiting for these creatures to appear from the weeds below so they could scoop them up. Much to my five-year-old's delight, along with the tadpoles came lots of other weird and wonderful creatures, including the alien-like damsel nymph. We've created lasting memories, and the boys are fascinated watching the tadpoles undergo their incredible metamorphoses. As Ellie Harrison wrote in her column last month, it's a shame these golf courses aren't open to all.





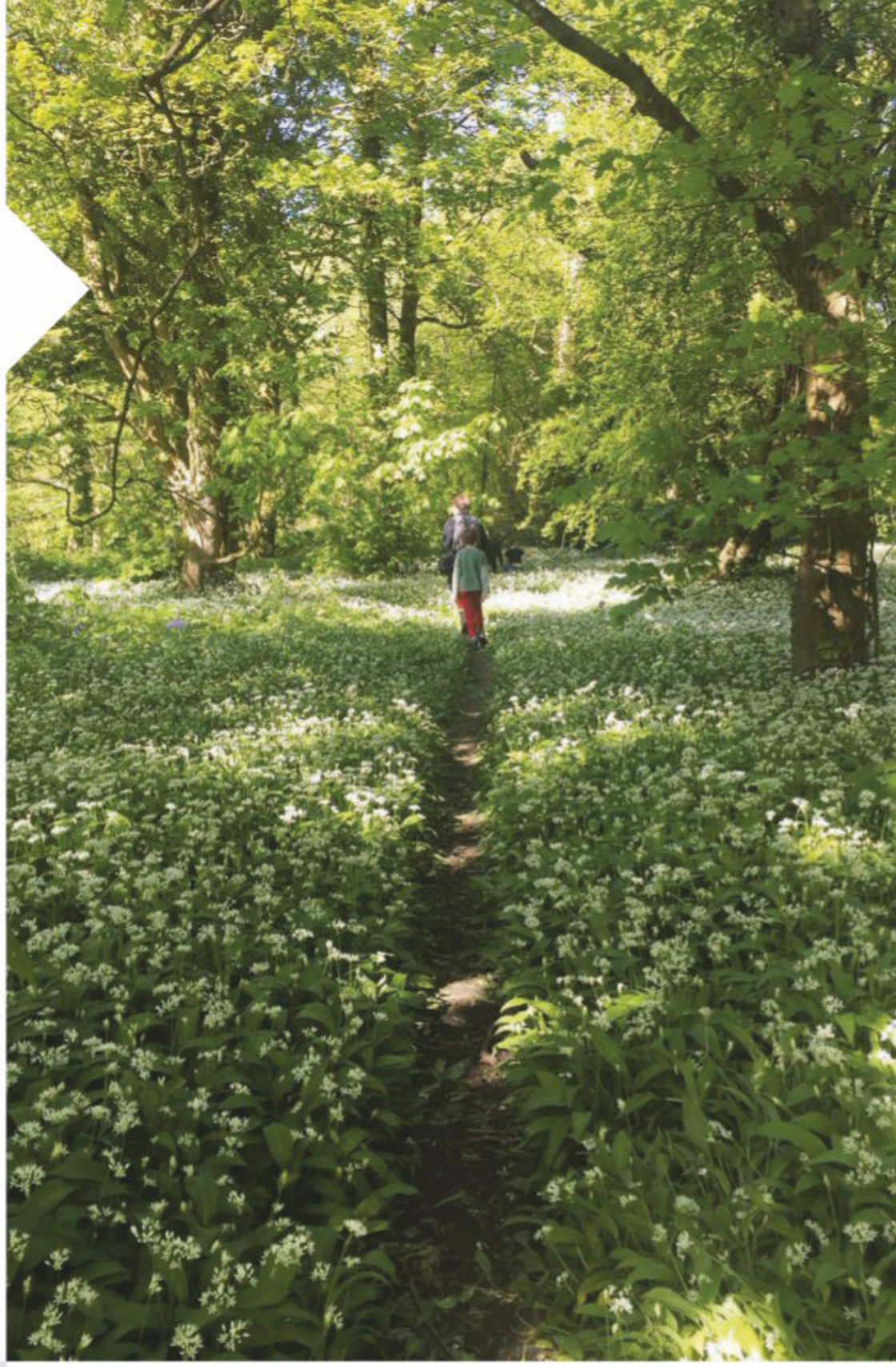
WILD GARLIC WOODS, CARDIFF

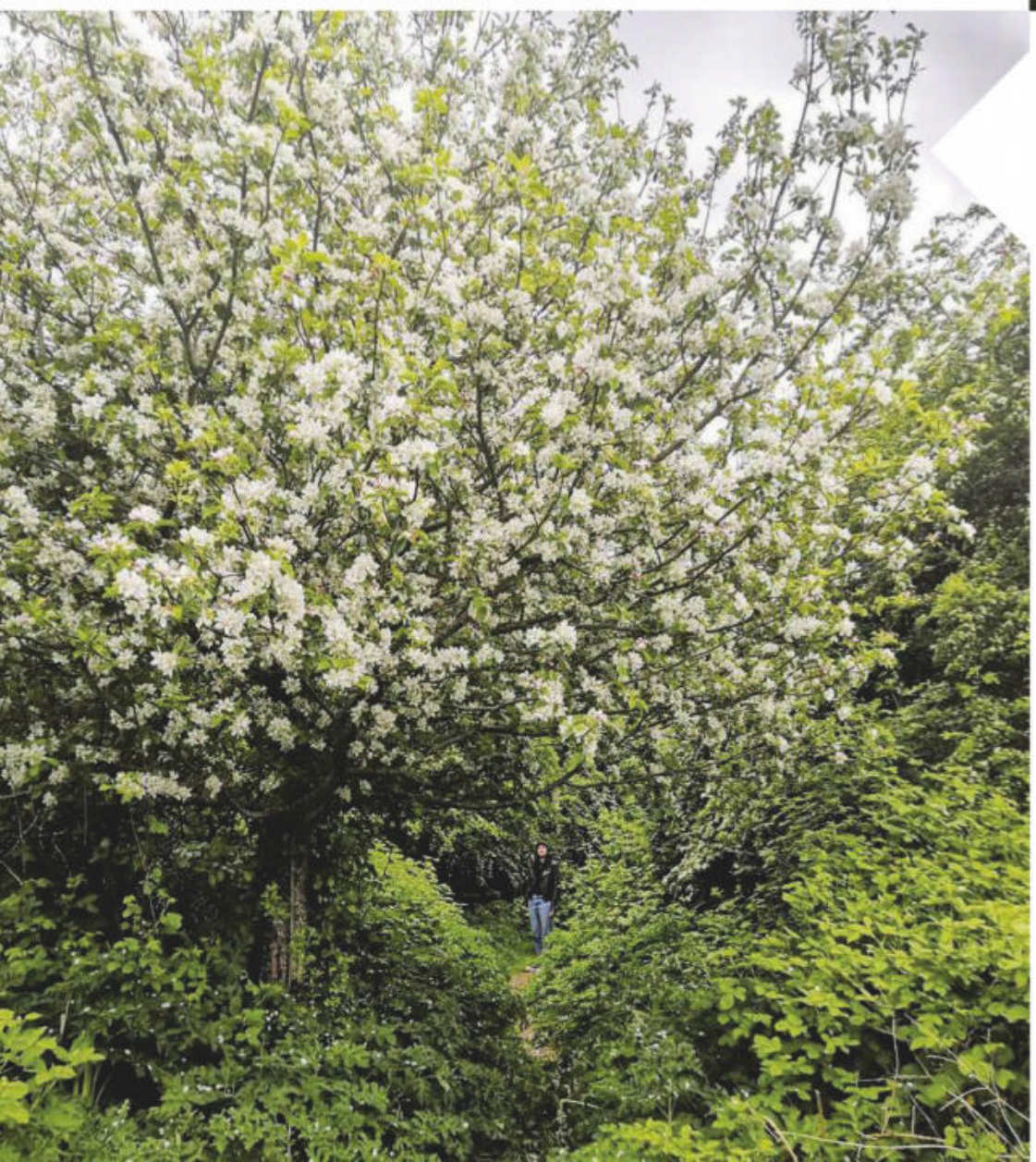
Margaret Bartlett, production editor

Living just two blocks from Cardiff's glorious Bute Park – with the Taff River running through its heart – has made the lockdown far less onerous for our little family of three. Once the grounds of Cardiff Castle, this glorious 52-hectare park is just one of the many legacies of vast wealth amassed through coal exploitation to be found in the Welsh capital. We thought we knew all its delightful nooks and crannies, having walked, biked and enjoyed ice creams here so often, but one gloriously warm, still afternoon we turned down a path we'd never walked before.

In contrast to the floods earlier this year, weeks of dry weather had seen the river run low, revealing inviting, pebbly riverine beaches. Searching for a way down to one of them, we took the narrow, left-hand fork in the path leading to the riverbank, instead of the wider right-hand path through the trees, and immediately felt silly that we hadn't explored this secluded route before. We were in Blackweir Woods, part of a wildlife corridor stretching from the Brecon Beacons right down to Cardiff Bay. Complete with bat boxes high in the trees, flitting butterflies, bright birdsong, delightfully fragrant swathes of wild garlic just coming into flower and mixed woodland arching over the banks of the river, it felt we were in the deepest countryside rather than an urban park.

We found several paths leading to the pebbly shores and we've since done our share of stone skimming and salmon spotting, even though detritus from the devastating flooding still littered the banks – torn plastic bags wafted from overhanging branches, sun-bleached rubbish was scattered on the river stones, a twisted, decaying mattress lay wedged against a tree trunk. We vowed to come back with gloves and rubbish bags to do our bit to clean-up, and declared it our new favourite place to explore. So on your next walk, be curious and take the path less travelled.







BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, BRISTOL

Laura Phillips, deputy art editor

Working from home has its pros and cons; one major con was that my daily walk to work of around 45 minutes was no longer. I decided a short walk to stretch the legs every lunchtime was going to be essential. However, from day one it was clear that everyone else at my local park had the same idea and, while it is close and beautiful, I desired a less popular location.

This lead me to walk in the opposite direction, towards a local trading estate. Shock horror – it seems people don't want to walk in 'ugly places'! But the stillness of this normally busy location brought some calm to my day; the soundtrack was now birdsong instead of heavy vehicles and industrious humans. My wanderings around the trading estate led to the discovery of a hidden gem behind it, a mini haven – a tiny nature reserve tucked between suburban streets. Drawn in by the sound of a babbling brook and the smell of wild garlic, I was overjoyed to find this secret spot with no people around and just the trees and birds for company.

This is now one of my regular daily walks. I've foraged for wild garlic here and walked every single path of it. I've noticed a few more people in the reserve as the weeks go by, so it seems other locals have also been exploring and are enjoying the discovery of this little suburban oasis. My tip is to not ignore the 'ugly places', as they may lead to hidden beauty.

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CURIOUS CURATE

He was a country vicar whose love for nature around his Hampshire home made him the world's first ecologist – quite by accident. **Matthew Oates** celebrates the Reverend Gilbert White, born 300 years ago this summer

"The parish I live in is a very abrupt, uneven country, full of hills and woods, and therefore full of birds," wrote naturalist Gilbert White, illustrated below circa 1750, of Selborne in Hampshire



Gilbert White (1720–1793) was a one-off. There's little about him that isn't at least highly idiosyncratic, but pleasantly so. This mild, inquiring and gloriously unambitious man inadvertently inspired generations of naturalists, including Charles Darwin and WH Hudson, and was admired by writers such as Virginia Woolf and Edward Thomas.

Gilbert, as he is affectionately known, is the wellspring of a mighty river. He has no detractors, though some readers may need to wait awhile before being grabbed. I couldn't read him as a teenager, when I devoured William Henry Hudson and others. Richard Mabey took even longer, but went on to produce a highly lauded biography (1986). Great naturalists are born, not made.

White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* is one of only four books that have remained continuously in print since publication, in 1789. It was, and remains, a game-changer. The sheer wonder in the natural history section grabs the reader, even those with little interest in nature, and even though it is written in an archaic letter-format. Copies are regularly encountered in guest rooms and downstairs loos. Sadly, it stuttered during Gilbert's lifetime and only took off during the 1830s. The second section, on the antiquities of Selborne, is a detailed parish history, containing much medieval and ecclesiastical Latin.

Gilbert's first calling was in horticulture, for he threw his considerable energies into transforming the gardens of his indolent father, at The Wakes, in the centre of Selborne in east Hampshire. This might have been because he had little else to do at the time. He became a pioneer in productive horticulture, in an era when landscape gardens and the picturesque were all the rage. There is much his writings can teach the modern gardener, notably about hotbeds and the growing of melons, with which he was obsessed. Gilbert was the first to grow potatoes, maize and rice in his district.

He also got sucked into landscape gardening fashion, cutting a ha-ha to separate the main garden from his (small) park, creating a vista through six gates, at the end of which he erected a grossly eccentric wooden statue of Hercules. He even met a guru of the picturesque movement, the poet Alexander Pope. But his main passion was for vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers that could be used purposefully.

ORIGINS OF THE NATURALIST

Gilbert was the eldest son of a large family, local to the Selborne area. This had drawbacks, as towards the end of his life he had more than 60 nephews and nieces in need of birthday remembrance, most of them residing locally – some challenge for an ageing curate obsessed with ornithology. He was educated privately, before being admitted to Oriel College, Oxford, of which he was to become a junior fellow. He was ordained and became a curate, though for much of his early life he was out of work or functioning as a locum. White spent five years, from 1745 to 1750, roaming around southern England, and passed a year as a provost at Oriel. Then, for a lengthy era he was curate of the neighbouring parish of Farringdon.

Selborne was his place of birth, and became his home for his last 60-odd years. Eventually, in 1784, he became Selborne's curate-in-charge, which may have been all he ever wanted from life. Truthfully, though, he had little interest in

"The sheer wonder in the natural history section grabs the reader"

Photos Getty

Gilbert White spent most of his life at The Wakes in Selborne, Hampshire. The house and grounds are now open to the public, with a museum and café

WALK WITH GILBERT

The wooded escarpment that forms an impressive backdrop to The Wakes is climbed by a path aptly called The Zig-Zag. Cut out by Gilbert White and his brother John in the early 1750s, this path runs from the southern edge of Selborne village car park, "rising 300 feet above the village... The covert of this eminence is altogether beech," wrote Gilbert. The summit offers a stunning vista over Selborne and the wooded countryside below, all the way to Alice Holt Forest and into leafy Surrey. The beech glades of Selborne Common can be readily explored from here.

18+

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“His writings reveal a rural polymath, with a wonderful turn of phrase”

material matters. His lifelong friend John Mulso told him: “You are yourself the richest man I know; for you are the only man of my acquaintance that does not want money.” Gilbert never married, though he certainly sowed some wild oats as an undergraduate.

Gilbert’s duties as a curate were far from onerous, extending to a total of around 50 baptisms, weddings and funerals a year. His faith may, of course, have been deeply personal. He was no evangelist, though it is clear that he ministered in an unpatronising manner to the rural poor, and was deeply loved by them. The memorial window to him in St Mary’s Church, Selborne, depicts St Francis ministering to the birds, but it is wrong to view Gilbert as a Franciscan figure. He was influenced by natural theology, which was in vogue at the time and provided arguments for the existence of God based on reason and the experience of nature.

ALL IN THE DETAIL

If anything, Gilbert was a pre-Darwin biologist, a meticulous observer and recorder of natural phenomena. His secret was simple: he had an inquiring mind and wrote everything down, in concise descriptive language. So few naturalists do. He kept remarkably detailed but clear journals, concentrating on birds, the garden, weather, seasonality, phenology (the study of seasonal phenomena) and what we can loosely term rural affairs, but he could be wowed by anything, and was. His writings suggest he was a rural polymath, with a wonderful turn of phrase.

Gilbert wanted to know how things worked. This meant that he was not averse to shooting birds, and locals were forever procuring specimens for him. Gilbert dutifully examined all specimens, and sometimes ate them. During one harsh winter, he cooked up the remains of a dissected bittern, and “found the flavour to be like that of wild duck, or teal, but not so delicate”. He loved birds, especially what were then known as the hirundines – the martins, swallow and swift – and was fascinated by the mysteries of their migration. He could hold conversation with any modern birder, though he would be amazed by the extent of change between his era and ours (his corncrakes and wrynecks are long gone, and the cuckoo now calls at Selborne only in passing). Today, the Selborne Society seeks to perpetuate interest in natural history in Gilbert White’s name.

Gilbert White was the first to start asking the right questions about nature, and to seek out the interconnectivities. Above all, he loved life – all life – and articulated this passion with great lucidity. His message to all of us is simple: observe, note and learn. His alert, inquiring mind is still very much part of the intense feeling of spirit of place, or genius loci, that is forever Selborne. CF





TOP Gilbert White’s house contains a treasure trove of natural history
ABOVE Installed in 1920, the stained-glass window at St Mary’s depicts St Francis preaching to birds that featured in White’s writings



Matthew Oates is a naturalist, writer and *Times* columnist who lived for 20 years near Selborne, where he was warden of Noar Hill Nature Reserve. His latest book, *His Imperial Majesty*, a natural history of the purple emperor butterfly, is published by Bloomsbury.

VISIT SELBORNE



Selborne is magnetic to nature lovers. It nestles below a steep wooded hillside within an area of richly varied landscape, geology and habitat in East Hampshire, inside the South Downs National Park.

Gilbert White’s house and gardens at The Wakes are usually open daily, 10.30am to 5pm, excluding Mondays. The museum contains many of White’s artefacts, plus a café, while the gardens have been restored to how they were in Gilbert’s day. The museum also holds the Oates Collection, relics from Lawrence Oates of the Antarctic and his African-explorer uncle, Frank. (gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk).

There is a sizable car park nearby, with loos, behind The Selborne Arms. This local pub serves meals (selbornearms.co.uk).

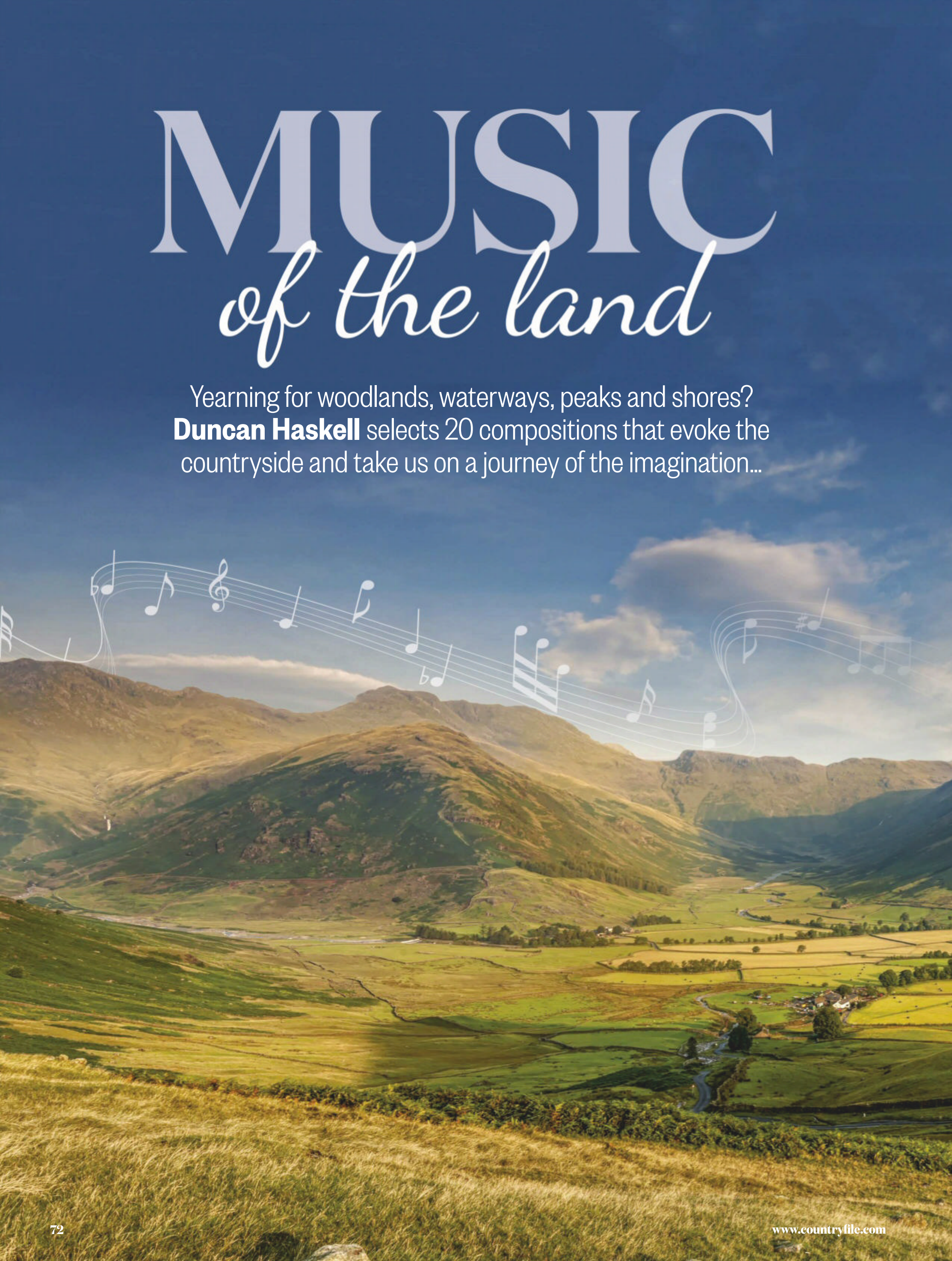
From here, explore Selborne, including The Plestor (the village green) and St Mary’s Church. There are several walks through places immortalised in Gilbert’s writings, including the Zig-Zag (see opposite) and The Lythe.

Selborne is four miles from novelist Jane Austen’s cottage at Chawton (janeaustens.house), and equally close to the wooded hillside above Steep where Edward Thomas lived and wrote most of his greatest poetry.

Photos Getty, Alamy

MUSIC *of the land*

Yearning for woodlands, waterways, peaks and shores? **Duncan Haskell** selects 20 compositions that evoke the countryside and take us on a journey of the imagination...



Like a cinema projectionist, the best music has the power to flick the switch that transports us to a different time or place. It also has the ability to either amplify our feelings or help us escape them. Songs are where we go to lose ourselves or to find something that is otherwise lacking. As is the natural world. Many of us are currently yearning for the great outdoors, that pastoral idyll of colourful people, wildlife and settings. Thankfully, sounds can take us there.

Just as the countryside inspired some of our finest composers to create their masterpieces, those same works can carry the listener from their armchair, high over the hills and across the oceans. The relationship between the landscape and music is a symbiotic one.

Admittedly, listening to Holst's *Egdon Heath* probably won't lift you up and drop you down upon his interpretation of Thomas Hardy's fictionalised Salisbury Plain, just as hearing the short flurry of activity coursing through Elgar's *Enigma Variations XI* may not bring to mind the unfortunate bulldog who fell into the River Wye. Instead, these pieces trigger our own memories; perhaps a heathland where you saw your first adder or an adventure had with your own four-legged friend.

The carefully crafted combination of melody and instrument can evoke a season, the elements, a place or even a specific animal or person. Most famous of all are the characters wonderfully brought to life in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* almost a century ago. *Loch Ness*, composed by Thea Musgrave in 2012, has a similarly magical effect. The tuba is Nessie, clearer than in any gift-shop toy.

Nature's restorative power has aided songwriters as much as any of us, cleansing stress and helping them return to simpler pleasures. As Paul McCartney sings songs to his family from his Scottish farm in the early 1970s, there's no sense that the former Beatle had just gone through one of musical history's most famous breakups. Instead, calm seems to wash over him, and the listener, as he gets back to the earth.

There is of course another side to country life, one of people working tirelessly to survive in challenging conditions. That different truth can be heard in the music of modern folk band Show of Hands, where Steve Knightley's lyrics often focus on the lives of real people in the rural West Country.

But the purpose here is to build a bridge between our homes and the fields, seas and skies – and we'd love to hear about the music that transports you. Here are 20 suggestions to get you started.

Although recently it hasn't been possible to drink in views such as this one, over Little Langdale in Cumbria, evocative music can transport you to vistas beyond your armchair





1. THE LARK ASCENDING
BY RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Perhaps the best-known example of a song evoking the sounds of nature, and for good reason. This single-movement work, inspired by George Meredith's poem of the same name, was completed in 1914 but wasn't heard until after the First World War. Coming after such a destructive period, the lark's weightless ascent, as played by a solo violin, takes on a startling grandeur.

2. VARIATION XI (ALLEGRO DI MOLTO)
BY EDWARD ELGAR

So strong is the composer's association with Worcestershire's Malvern Hills that it's possible to explore the Elgar Route, where you can soak up the scenery that inspired so much of his work. For this dramatic and brief piece, one of his 14 *Enigma Variations*, we're heading to the River Wye and a musical recounting of the time the bulldog belonging to organist George Robertson Sinclair fell into the river, went for a short paddle and returned safely to land.



3. SUMMER MUSIC
BY ARNOLD BAX

This tone poem was originally written by Bax in 1917 before undergoing serious revisions in 1920 and 1932. For *Summer Music*, the composer drew inspiration from the beech woods near his home in the Chilterns. This lyrical piece does exactly what its creator set out to achieve, managing to capture: "A hot windless June midday in some woodland place of southern England."

4. A SONG OF SUMMER
BY FREDERICK DELIUS

Another summer vignette, but here looking across the ocean from a field of heather on the Yorkshire coast. Completed in 1931, the music's ability to capture the rolling wave and gulls gliding on the wind is even more startling in light of the fact that Delius was blind and paralysed at the time and only able to compose with the help of his amanuensis, Eric Fenby.



Photos: Getty, Alamy



5. THE EXE ESTUARY
BY SHOW OF HANDS

It's not just classical pieces that can transport us to our favourite places; folk music can be just as expressive. This track is taken from Show of Hand's 2003 instrumental album *The Path*, recorded to mark the silver jubilee of the South West Coastal Path. Contemplative and outward-facing, it has a weight that is suggestive of opportunities that may lie across the Channel. It also demonstrates Steve Knightley and Phil Beer's deep understanding of their home patch.



6. RAINBOW RIVER
BY VASHTI BUNYAN

Wordless music allows us to fill in the gaps with our own associations, but lyrics don't always clog the imagination. This song comes from the English songwriter's revered 1970 album *Just Another Diamond Day* which was inspired by her travels through Scotland on horse and carriage. There's a simplicity to both the music and lyrics of 'Rainbow River', which fits how many view the country. A young fisherman, fair-haired farmer and hovering hawk bring this bucolic scene to life.



7. LITTLE BIRD BY GOLDFRAPP

Alison Goldfrapp and Will Gregory, the duo behind the glam-pop band Goldfrapp, tend to keep their pastoral influences concealed beneath layers of shimmering electronica. That changed on their 2008 album *Seventh Tree*, a simpler folk-inflected affair that revealed their love of the countryside, in particular of Wiltshire and its rolling hills. Lyrically and sonically, 'Little Bird' is very much the sound of a band getting back to nature.



8. KINGFISHER
BY BERT JANSCH

Bert Jansch, formerly of the group Pentangle, recorded an instrumental folk album called *Avocet* in February 1978, during the height of punk. His paean to British birdlife, it also includes the songs 'Lapwing', 'Bittern', 'Osprey' and 'Kittiwake'. On 'Kingfisher', Danny Thompson's gliding double bass and Martin Jenkins's violin dance around Jansch's guitar work – this combination is in parts both calming and energetic, reflective of the aqua-blue dart.



9. WATER
BY SALLY BEAMISH

Piano Concerto No 1: *Hill Stanzas* was a commission for the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, the Orchestra Filharmonica di Torino, L'Orchestre de Picardie and Norrlandsoperan Symphony Orchestra. Beamish wrote most of this concerto in 2016 while staying in the Cairngorms National Park. 'Water', the first of four parts, isn't just a babbling burn but a full on stormy downpour.

10. THE SEA: I. SEASCAPE
BY FRANK BRIDGE

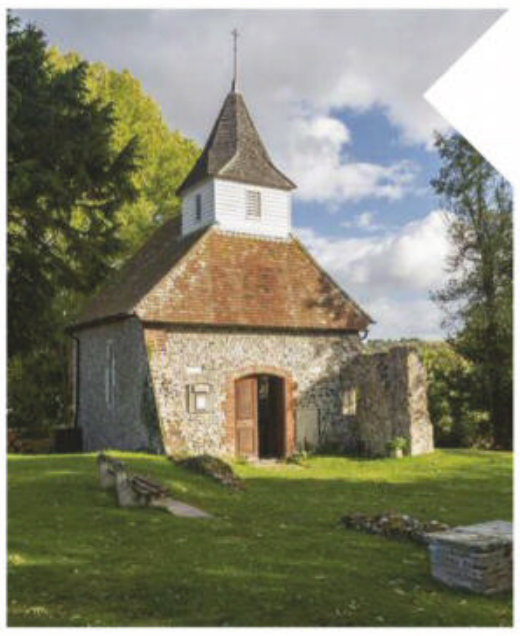
So stirring it inspired a 10-year-old Benjamin Britten, this four-movement piece was completed in Frank Bridge's Eastbourne home in 1911. At the premiere, Bridge said this movement, "Paints the sea on a summer morning. From high drifts is seen an expanse of waters lying in the sunlight..." The other three parts evoke sea-foam, moonlight and storm.





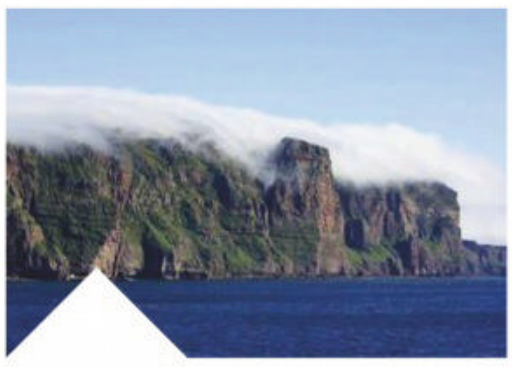
11. THE CURLEW: INTERLUDE BY PETER WARLOCK

The pseudonym of writer Philip Arnold Heseltine, Warlock was a composer whose scandalous lifestyle often overshadowed his work. His creative peak came during a three-year stay in the Severn Valley from 1921–24, during which his song cycle *The Curlew* was completed, inspired by the poems of WB Yeats. It is the instrumental interlude that conjures up the strongest yearning; here the curlew's plaintive call is represented by the cor anglais.



12. THE SMALLEST CHURCH IN SUSSEX BY BRITISH SEA POWER

The members of indie rock band British Sea Power are known for their love of the great outdoors and have drawn inspiration from their peregrinations among Sussex's rolling hills and chalky coastline. The titular church, located at Lullington on the South Downs, was discovered by the band's bassist Neil Wilkinson while out on a ramble and found its way onto an early B-side in 2003.



13. HAAR BY ERLAND COOPER

Contemporary composer Erland Cooper released a triptych of albums shaped by the Orkney Islands where he grew up. 'Haar' is named after a sea mist that can consume Orkney's harbours and this track envelopes the listener in a similar way. Blurring the lines between music and nature, its ambience is enhanced by the sound of actual thunder (recorded by Cooper).

14. EGDON HEATH BY GUSTAV HOLST

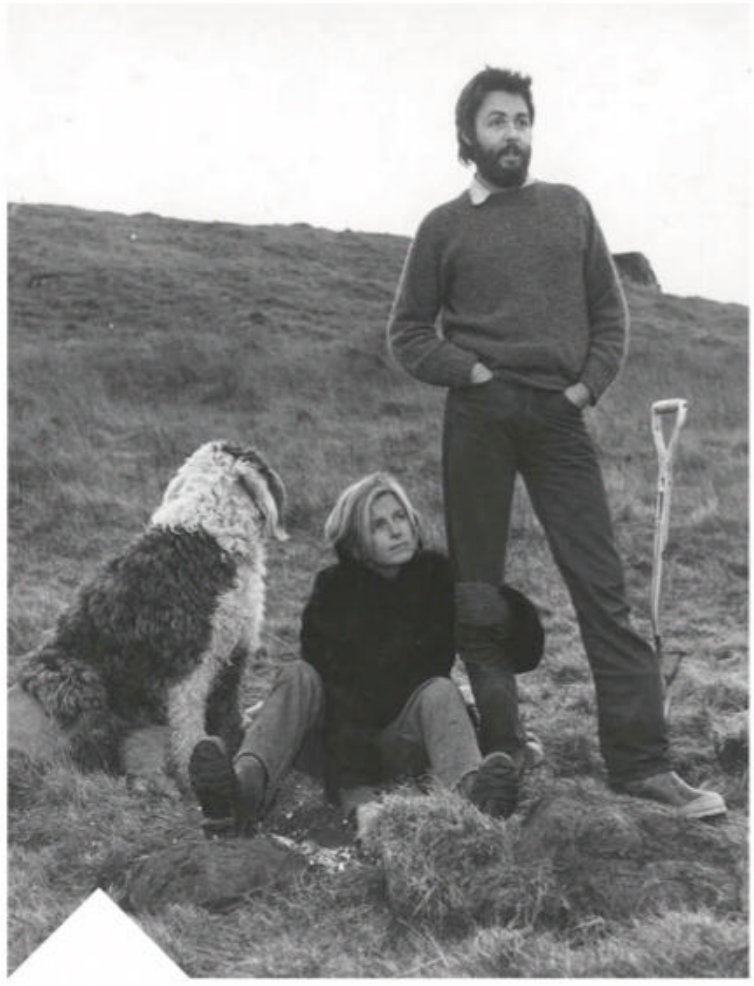
Best known for his more celestial compositions, *Egdon Heath* was Holst's first full-scale orchestral work after *The Planets*. Written in 1927 as an homage to Thomas Hardy, it was inspired by a description of heath at the start of *The Return of the Native*. Rather than a romanticised version of the English countryside, this is an honest and austere portrayal.





15. MAI-DUN BY JOHN IRELAND

Just as music can bring the supernatural to life, so can it reanimate ancient history. That's exactly what the composer John Ireland did with his 1921 orchestral piece. Inspired by, and named after, a prehistoric fort and earthworks found at Maiden Castle in Dorset, there's a belligerence to the score that you can't help but link to the fort's sometimes violent past – the site is home to a cemetery containing more than 52 bodies, including soldiers killed in skirmishes.



16. BIP BOP / HEY DIDDLE BY PAUL & LINDA MCCARTNEY

Watching YouTube footage of Paul and Linda McCartney performing these songs while sat outside their small farmhouse in Scotland, with their children at their feet, is an image at odds with the inner turmoil that we know he was going through in the late 1960s/early 1970s. In those images and these songs, the restorative power of our landscape, currently being missed by so many of us, is brought into stark focus.



17. THE BIG SKY BY KATE BUSH

Realism is all well and good but the freedom of the outside world also allows us to indulge our imaginations. It is impossible to listen to 'The Big Sky' without wanting to lie down in a field on a sunny summer's day and watch the clouds paint their pictures overhead, as Kate Bush remembers simple childhood pleasures that are increasingly lost in adulthood. This song is from the progressive-pop genius's finest album, 1985's *Hounds of Love*, a work that portrays nature's majesty throughout.



18. LOCH NESS
BY THEA MUSGRAVE

There's something Prokofievian about the way Scottish-American composer Thea Musgrave uses the tuba to embody the most famous of mythical creatures. Musgrave's Nessie emerges from a dense mist, breaking through to enjoy a play as the sun begins to shine. With a significant decrease in spotters on the loch's waters and banks currently, who is to say this isn't exactly what he's up to right now?

19. HARESHAW BURN
BY THE KATHRYN TICKELL BAND

Kathryn Tickell is a renowned composer, violinist and piper whose work is rooted in Northumberland's landscape. To listen to 'Hareshaw Burn', found on the 2007 album *Instrumental*, is to follow a stream near her home down from its source. The water's quickening pace is matched by the music, perfect harmony between sound and topography.





20. THE FAIR DAY
BY HERBERT HAMILTON HARTY

We could have opted for the great Irish composer's tone poem *With the Wild Geese*, but being disconnected from the countryside isn't only about missing its beauty and tranquility. There's also the day-to-day excitement of the country calendar captured on 'The Fair Day'. Part of 1904's *An Irish Symphony*, it was influenced by a local carnival – complete with village band, cattle and fizzy sweets.

Listen to all the songs featured on our Spotify playlist, *Countryfile Magazine: Music of the Land*. **open.spotify.com/playlist/6NCLeP17KxwsaUgCnfw6MZ?si=T7IPDLhtTBGCI4IWxeB1RA**

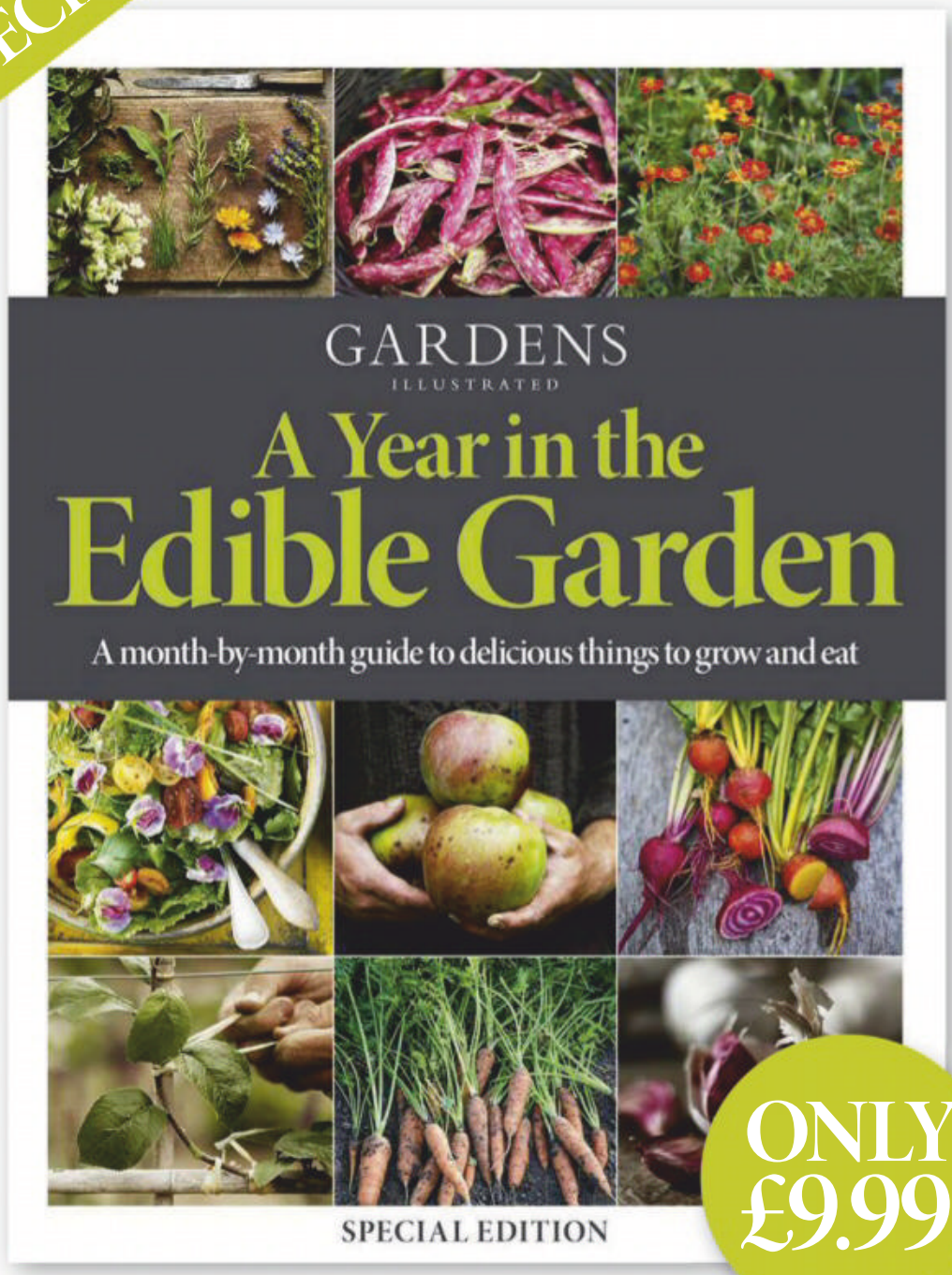


Duncan Haskell is the editor of *Songwriting Magazine*. A music journalist with a passion for the natural world, he can often be found exploring the woods near his Bristol home with his dog Frazzle.

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WALK: Murlough National Nature Reserve, County Down

DAZZLING DUNES OF THE EMERALD ISLE

Keith Fergus discovers a gorgeous slice of Northern Irish coastline, where butterflies and beetles live alongside wildflowers, waders and sunbathing seals

Situated 3.5 miles north-east of the coastal town of Newcastle in County Down, Murlough National Nature Reserve is a wildlife-watchers' dream. Its range of habitats play host to a vast diversity of flora and fauna, and the long, sandy beach is the focal point of a fantastic walk, overlooked by the iconic Mourne Mountains.

SHAPE-SHIFTING LAND

Murlough was the first National Nature Reserve to be designated in Northern Ireland and has been cared for by the National Trust since 1967. It is home to a fragile 6,000-year-old dune system, and it is thought that human history here extends some 4,000 years with evidence of occupation from the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods.

Today, Murlough – which derives from the Irish 'Murlach', meaning 'sea inlet' – is a landscape shifted and shaped by the wind and waves that whip across the natural enclave of Dundrum Bay.

COASTAL CREATURES

Habitats at Murlough include species-rich grassland, woodland, coastline and dune heath, an element that is rare across Europe. The dunes themselves climb high above the beach and are only dwarfed by the majestic Mourne Mountains that rise to the south, their gorgeous outline dominating the surrounding landscape.

> "IT IS A LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY THE WIND AND WAVES THAT WHIP ACROSS THE BAY"

Unsurprisingly, the range of wildlife to be found at Murlough is spectacular. Rabbits were introduced here during the 12th century and today the population plays an important role in preserving the dune structure. Wildfowl and waders, common and grey seals, 23 species of butterflies (the reserve is one of the last strongholds of the endangered marsh fritillary), over 250 types of beetle and even the pygmy shrew – the smallest mammal found in Britain – can all be found within the reserve. It truly is an incredible place, and one best explored with this easy circular walk.



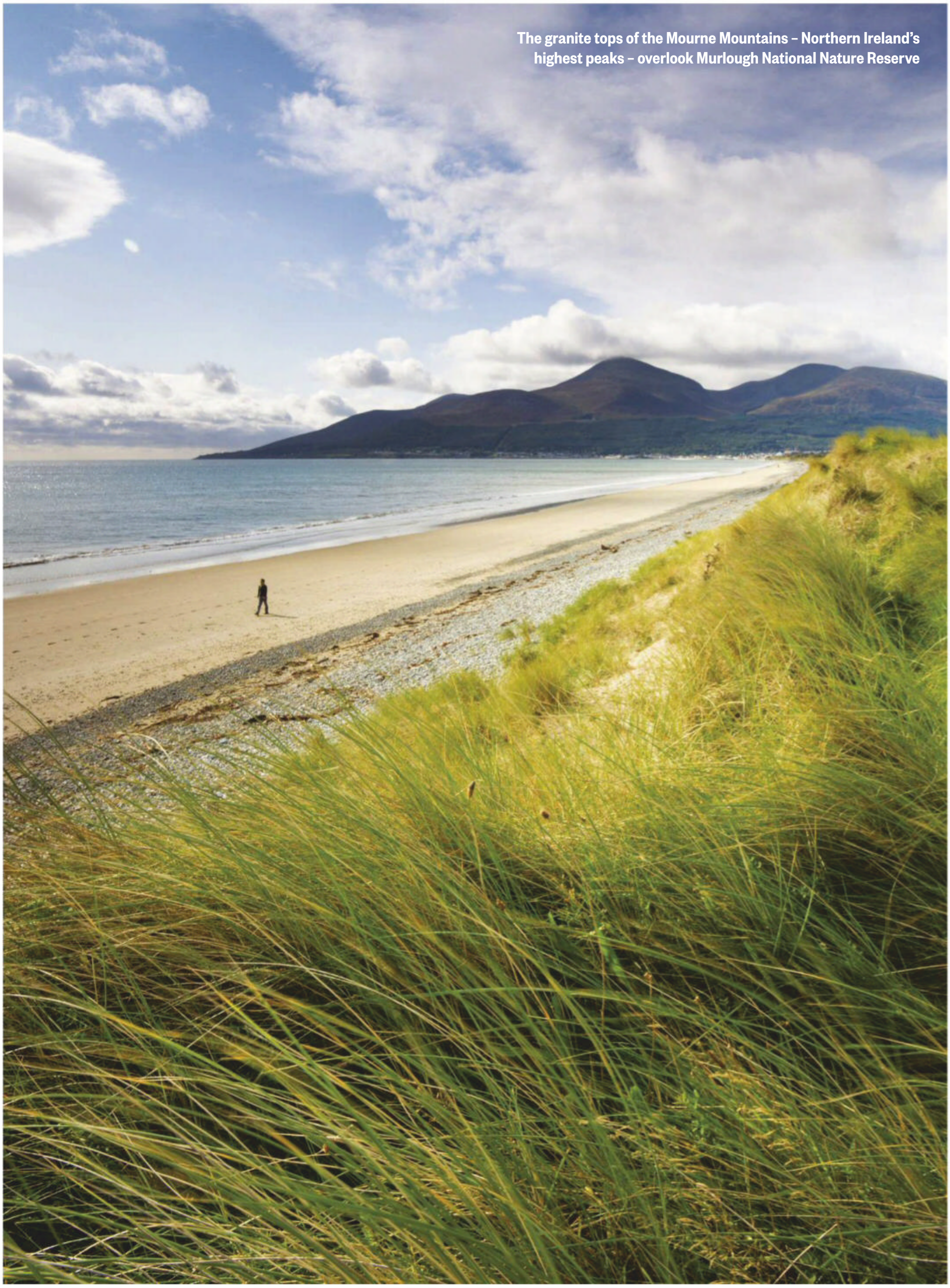
Murlough is home to both common seals, pictured, and grey seals

1 FLOWERS IN THE SAND

The walk starts at the large Murlough National Nature Reserve car park that sits on the north side of the A2, a few minutes' drive from Newcastle. Carefully cross the road into Murlough National Nature Reserve to join a track that immediately splits.

Keep right on to a lane then pass through a gate and follow a boardwalk south-east towards Dundrum Bay, backed by the enormous dune system that rises some 20m in height.

The boardwalk veers right and drops down to a fork. Go left through grassland; in spring and summer there are lots of wildflowers here, including marram grass,



The granite tops of the Mourne Mountains – Northern Ireland's highest peaks – overlook Murlough National Nature Reserve

Photos Alamy







LEFT Rabbits were introduced to the area by the Normans to provide them with a source of food and fur TOP RIGHT Willow warblers arrive in spring, when they nest and raise young before returning to Africa in autumn BELOW RIGHT Devil's-bit scabious blooms from July to October

bird's-foot trefoil, wild pansy, shepherd's cress, lady's bedstraw and devil's-bit scabious (a particular favourite of the marsh fritillary).

Continue all the way to the dunes and walk through them to reach the gorgeous beach at Dundrum Bay, where the boardwalk culminates. The beach offers a sumptuous vista of the Mourne Mountains, particularly the peaks of Slieve Commedagh and Slieve Donard – the latter, at 850m above sea level, is the highest point in Northern Ireland.

2 BASKING SEALS

Turn left and follow the gorgeous curve of Dundrum Bay north-east – if the tide is out, the sand is firmer away from the dunes – with the outlook extending all the way to St John's Point Lighthouse. Built in 1844, it stands 40m high and is the tallest onshore lighthouse on the Irish coast.

It is a stunning beach to walk along with plentiful birdlife. Little egrets, dunlins, pale-bellied Brent geese, oystercatchers, golden plovers, lapwings and godwits are just a few of the species that can be seen here at different times of the year.

Continue on, with the beach and dunes eventually curving left to reach the inlet of Dundrum Bay, a good place to spot common and grey seals basking on the sand.

Now the sand heads north-west along the southern shore of the inlet, to the right of woodland, where there are fine views of the village of Dundrum and its prominent castle. It is thought that Dundrum Castle was constructed in 1177 by John De Courcy as part of his coastal defence after he invaded Ulster. Walk along the sand for 300m to reach a wide gap in the trees.

3 BRIDGING THE BAY

Turn left away from the inlet and head south along the sand for approximately 150m to a flight of steps on the right. Take these into the woodland and follow a path, soon climbing more steps. At the top, continue straight on around a barrier, then turn right on to a road. To the left is the impressive Murlough House, dating to around 1900.

Follow the access road north-west, enjoying the peaceful estate grounds surrounding Murlough House and fine views towards Slieve Croob and Dundrum. When the road eventually leaves the estate grounds, keep on, then, just before reaching Downshire Bridge, which spans Dundrum Inner Bay, turn left on to a track.

4 SHORELINE BIRDS

The track offers easy walking along the bay, another haven for birdlife, including lapwings, redshanks, oystercatchers and curlews. During the winter, small numbers of black-tailed godwits, turnstones and grey plovers may be present.

When the track splits, keep right to pass several cottages before it runs alongside the southern edge of Dundrum Inner Bay. Taking in further fabulous views of the Mourne Mountains, continue all the way back to the A2, carefully cross the road and return to the car park.



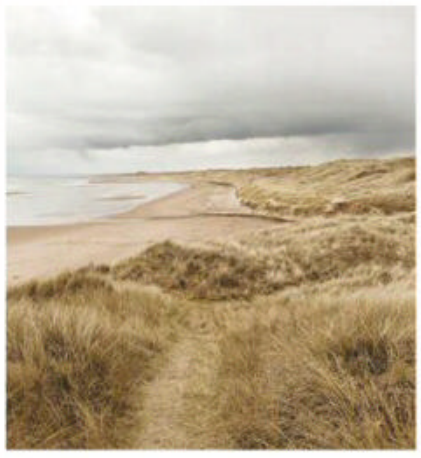
Keith Fergus lives in Glasgow and escapes to the countryside whenever he can.

THE ROUTE

4.75 MILES/7.6KM I 2.5 HOURS I EASY



THREE MORE DAZZLING DUNE SYSTEMS



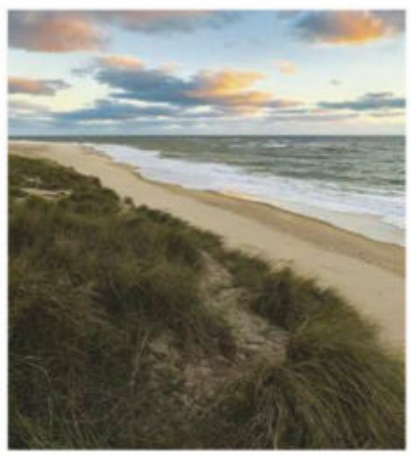
SANDS OF FORVIE
ABERDEENSHIRE

Situated near Ellon on the Aberdeenshire coast, the Sands of Forvie is one of the largest dune systems in Scotland. Making up part of the Forvie National Nature Reserve – also home to the celebrated Ythan Estuary – the dunes are 20m high and form a nesting site for both common and sandwich terns.



MORFA HARLECH
GYWNEDD

Morfa Harlech forms part of Ceredigion Bay in Wales and is one of the most important actively growing dune systems in Britain. Rare plants here include the three-coloured dune pansy, pyramidal orchid and bee orchid, along with insects such as the six-spot burnet moth and common blue butterfly.



WINTERTON DUNES
NORFOLK

Part of the Norfolk Coast AONB and a National Nature Reserve, Winterton is an extensive dune system that has more in common ecologically with the Baltic countries than other dune systems along the Norfolk Coast. It is also home to 300 pairs of little tern, the largest colony in Britain.

Photos: Getty, Alamy

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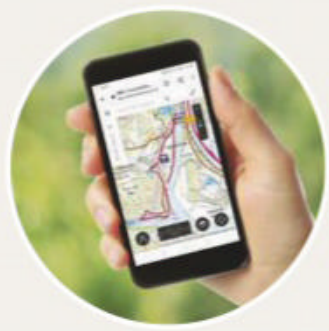
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Ordnance Survey

WALK: Roseland Peninsula, Cornwall

CORNISH SONGBIRD

Cirl buntings have returned to Cornwall, and a summer walk on the Roseland Peninsula offers a rare opportunity to spot these charismatic songbirds, says **Pete Dommett**

The cirl bunting was once widespread across the south of England. But by the late 1980s – due to a loss of its favoured, traditionally managed, mixed farm habitat – it was in danger of disappearing as a British breeding bird.

Thankfully, a long-running RSPB project has now boosted the population in its South Devon stronghold by 10-fold. The scheme has also returned the species to neighbouring Cornwall – the first successful reintroduction of a songbird in Europe.

1 CASTLE ON THE COAST

Tear yourself away from the eye-watering views at St Mawes Castle – built in 1540 by Henry VIII – and head to the end of Castle Drive. Go through a gate into Newton Cliff and follow the footpath through fields thick with bracken and bramble and alive with butterflies (painted ladies were plentiful in 2019). Along the rocky shoreline of Carrick Roads, sandwich terns can be spotted among groups of gulls, identified by their striking yellow-tipped black bills.

2 EXOTIC MALES

The path ends at Church Town Farm – a prime place to look for cirl buntings. As you join the road and walk uphill from the boatyard, scan the hedge tops and field margins for sparrow-sized birds. Females cirls are streaky brown, while males are exotically marked with black throats, matching eye-stripes and bright yellow bellies.

3 TROPICAL TEA-BREAK

Carry on to the charming church of St Just-in-Roseland. This 13th-century granite chapel sits in lush, semi-tropical gardens on the edge of a tranquil creek, the perfect place for a mid-walk picnic. Cornish cream teas are available from Miss V's Teashop nearby. After a scone (or two), climb a set of steps (opposite the toilets) that leads on to a green lane and, eventually, out into open farmland. Follow the hedgeline, right, to a gateway and then a track around to the left.

Just before you reach the main road, cross over a stile on your right (signposted to Halwartha) and take the footpath along the top of



St Mawes Castle was one of a number of forts built in the 16th century to counter invasion from the Continent

Photos Alamy, Getty

sloping fields, keeping an eye out for hunting kestrels hovering overhead.

4 SONGS AND SCONES

At Halwartha water tower, turn right. Before continuing downhill and back to Newton Cliff and St Mawes, check the area closely for more cirls. With luck, you'll be treated to a male bunting belting out its summer song from a hedgerow perch. It is a crisp, rapid rattle, similar to a yellowhammer's 'little bit of bread...' chorus, but without the cheesy finish.

Apparently, the Cornish cirl bunting's song is subtly different to that of its Devonian cousin; the avian equivalent of the jam-then-cream topping variation on those scones.



Pete Dommett is an award-winning wildlife writer who lives in Somerset.

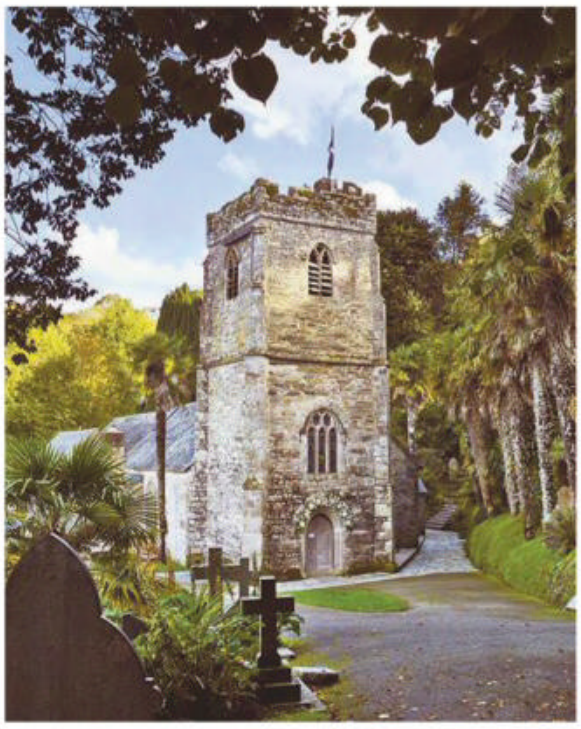
THE ROUTE

4.5 MILES/7.3KM | 3 HOURS | MODERATE

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Poet John Betjeman described St Just-in-Roseland as "the most beautiful churchyard on earth"; male cirl buntings have distinctive black markings; look out for painted lady butterflies

CIRL BUNTING HOTSPOTS



LABRADOR BAY, DEVON

This RSPB reserve, between Torquay and Teignmouth, is a showcase site for cirl buntings.



PRAWLE POINT, DEVON

Cirls can be seen along the coastal footpath of Devon's southernmost point.



EXMINSTER AND POWDERHAM MARSHES, DEVON

Seek out cirls at this RSPB reserve, three miles from the centre of Exeter.



PORTSCATHO, CORNWALL

Scan the fields on the outskirts of this village for buntings.

DAY OUT: Great Glen Way, Highland

DANCING IN THE TREES

Look out for leaping red squirrels and dashing pine martens on the Great Glen Way, says **Maria Hodson**

Stretching from Fort William on Scotland's west coast to Inverness on the east, the Great Glen Way provides 79 miles of spectacular walking along the majestic glens and glinting lochs that comprise this giant fault line.

Mostly low-level, the route can be completed in four to seven days and passes mighty Ben Nevis and inscrutable Loch Ness, while offering the chance to spy two of Scotland's much shyer stars – red squirrels and pine martens.

The best places to spot these elusive arboreal species are in the stretches of mixed broadleaf woodland and pockets of native pine that fringe the lochs between Gairlochy and Drumnadrochit.

RED MAGIC

The rare red squirrel is as pretty as its pictures – a soft ball of russet fur, tufty ears and acrobatic elegance. Smaller and lighter than the familiar hefty greys, the red squirrel darts along slender branches and tumbles delicately between trees as it forages for seeds, nuts and berries. Look out for the signature roughly stripped pine cones on the woodland floor to indicate its presence and scan the wood for sightings of a drey, the football-sized nest of woven twigs and moss, often situated in the fork of a tree trunk. Producing two or three young in February, reds often have a second litter from May to June.



Most of the UK's red squirrel population – estimated at 120,000–140,000 – resides in Scotland's woodlands

DUSK DWELLERS

The red squirrel's natural predator, the pine marten, also may be its inadvertent ally. Studies suggest that the pine marten's preference for hunting the slower, heavier grey squirrel has caused the greys gradually to retreat south, while red squirrels populate territory in their wake.

The endangered pine marten is a beguiling combination of sinew and chocolate fur, with a creamy patch at the throat and a long bushy tail. It is highly agile, stretching down trees, racing up trunks and sprinting across the ground in pursuit of its prey.

Dens are usually located in tree cavities or in bird or squirrel nests, with up to five kits born in April. By July, the young will be braving the outside world and learning to make their first kill. Due to their scarcity, shy nature and mostly nocturnal activity, pine martens are hard to spot, but dusk is a good time to look for these mustelids, as they emerge quietly to hunt.

WILD STAYS

If it proves too time-consuming to watch and wait among the trees, several hostels and B&Bs en route have feeding stations in their gardens, where both these enterprising mammals will pay regular visits. Try Craik Na Dav B&B in Invermoriston or Glen Albyn Lodge at Invergarry.



Maria Hodson loves taking long woodland walks and looking out for wildlife.

Photo Getty



Cressbrook Dale is home to a number of elusive creatures, including the glow-worm *Lampyris noctiluca* (inset). Its scientific name translates as 'night-shining fire lamp'

NIGHT OUT: Cressbrook Dale, Derbyshire

DUSK IN THE DALE

Helen Moat uncovers glowing bugs, primitive amphibians and strange silhouettes on a twilight walk in the Peak District National Park

On a warm summer's evening some years back, I woke my young son from his night's sleep to take him on a twilight adventure. As we drove to Cressbrook Dale, the sun slowly dropping, blood-orange oozed across the sky like ink on blotting paper and I wondered why I didn't walk more often at this magical time of day.

On the elbow of the road above Cressbrook village, we met up with our host from Natural England and descended into the woodland above the dale. We felt movement above our heads, then saw the dark blurry shapes of pipistrelle bats as they flitted through trees, searching for insects. With a bat detector, we tuned into their high-pitched chatter.

CURIOUS LIGHTS

As we crossed a stile into the open dale, the light was fading. Through the gloaming we could see two lines of green fluorescent dots stretching out along the brookside path like an airport runway. Eyes filled with wonder, my toddler crouched down to get a closer look at the bioluminescent *Lampyris noctiluca* – our first glow-worms. Not really worms, the adult female beetles emit a glowing light to attract a mate. It was a rare and precious sighting.

If you continue towards the head of the valley, you'll come to the limestone knoll of Peter's Stone. It's believed the last public hanging in Derbyshire took place here in 1815. Story goes, the convicted murderer's body hung from the gibbet for 11 years before the locals complained about the noise of clattering bones in the wind.

Veering away from the grisly gibbet rock, we crossed a bridge and climbed the steep valley to a dewpond. I fetched our torches and we shone the lights into the murky water. Black beady eyes stared at us from lumpy, misshapen beings with serrated backs. These strange, primitive amphibians, looking like something between fish, frog and lizard, are great crested newts, a protected species. Lower down on the slope, we trained our binoculars on a badger's sett. Eventually, dark silhouettes appeared on the opposite hillside – there then gone, but thrilling just the same.

We dropped down to the valley floor again, guided this time by tea-candles rather than glow-worms, aware we had experienced something extraordinary – an otherworldly land transformed by the goings-on of nocturnal wildlife.



Helen Moat is a writer, walker and cyclist, happiest when outside and on the move.

Photos Alamy



Willowherb fringes a summer pool deep in this little-visited Welsh wetland. Sit beside one of these 'watering holes' and let nature come to you

DAY OUT: Cors Caron, Ceredigion

WILD WATERS OF LEGEND

A huge wetland jewel forgotten in the heart of Wales – what an opportunity for adventure with a marvellous cast of wildlife, says **Fergus Collins**

Lost in the seldom visited tranquillity of inland Ceredigion, this wilderness of bogs, reed grasses, woods and deep, dark lagoons comes as a huge surprise to travellers venturing along the road north of the ancient farming town of Tregaron.

On the OS map, Cors Caron National Nature Reserve appears as a huge, intriguing area of wiggling blue lines and marshy tufts but when you see it for the first time, the strange vastness appears to stretch to distant smoky hills – the view punctuated by the silhouettes and cries of waterbirds. In fact, it's actually three bogs surrounded by pools and streams and feels like a place of Welsh myth and mystery.

BURSTING WITH LIFE

This otherworldly atmosphere is somewhat dispelled on a sunny summer's day when the sheer intensity and volume of life is heartening rather than disquieting. You're surrounded by hopping, buzzing, whirring, skating and bugling hordes, as Cors Caron is home to myriad insects. Dragonflies are the summer stars: 16 species dwell here as does the super-rare large heath butterfly. Otters stalk the waterways, hunting eels and trout, while summer birdlife ranges from resident wildfowl to an orchestra of redstarts, sedge warblers, meadow pipits and a host of other more familiar species. Cors Caron is also a stronghold for adders, slow worms, frogs and newts.

Photos Alamy, Getty, RSPB Images

CORS CARON NATURE RESERVE

Follow the boardwalks for easy routes or take the signposted Riverside Walk for a more challenging trip

IN ASSOCIATION WITH Ordnance Survey



TREE PIPITS

Look for tree pipits in spring and early summer on the edges of copses.



BOGBEAN

Bogbean's delicate flowers belie its rather prosaic name.



CURLEWS

The curlew's haunting, bubbling cry is best heard in April.



OTTERS

Otters ply the Teifi and larger lagoon pools in search of eels and trout.



PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Purple loosestrife's blooms last from July to September.



KEELED SKIMMERS

The cobalt-blue keeled skimmer flies from June to September.

Perhaps the most dependable summer joy comes from the wetland plants. You can't miss the handsome spikes of purple loosestrife flowers, and the complex creamy puffs of bogbean flowers belie the plant's rather prosaic name. The exotic and intricate red petals of marsh cinquefoil seem from another, more tropical swamp.

The bog itself was formed over many millennia as the river meandered slowly through a broad upland valley, creating marshes that turned to 'raised' bog, as countless generations of plants and trees lived, died and turned into peat. The River Teifi lives a rather topsy-turvy existence compared to most of its Welsh cousins. Instead of racing noisily from the uplands to finish gently by the sea, the Teifi oozes slowly from its source through Cors Caron and it is only later on its journey that it dashes into rocky gorges on its way to Cardigan Bay.

> "WITH THE LONELY CRIES OF WATERBIRDS, IT IS A PLACE OF WELSH MYTH AND MYSTERY"

TO THE RIVER

Wild it may be but Cors Caron is not inaccessible. Two miles of boardwalk from the old trainline to the car park mean that wheelchairs and prams can easily reach the moody heart of the southern end of the reserve – and the bird observatory. For those wanting a longer exploration, you can leave the boardwalk and cross a rushy meadow (the path is marked by red-topped fence posts) to reach the river. Check the Riverside Walk is open as it is sometimes closed for cattle grazing.

Follow the river and the red-topped posts upstream to enter the heart of the fen. Cross several bridges before reaching another boardwalk at the north of the reserve, which returns you to the old trainline and a potter back to the car park.



Fergus Collins is the editor of *BBC Countryfile Magazine*. He lives in Wales.

DAY OUT: Ventnor, Isle of Wight

TASTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

A community of wall lizards resides among the cracks and crevices of an old stone wall on the outskirts of Ventnor. This spectacular summer sight conjures up images of distant shores, says **Chris Gee**

As we adjust to our new reality, with restrictions on long-distance travel, it is reassuring to know that there are places close to home where it's still possible to enjoy a taste of something exotic.

The Isle of Wight's south coast footpath from Ventnor to St Lawrence (four miles) offers an opportunity for a Mediterranean and Caribbean experience. Here you will discover bright green wall lizards, and great sightings of bottlenose dolphins close to shore. I've enjoyed watching one 15-strong pod linger for a good 20 minutes in the sparkling coastal waters.



Wall lizards, found on the southern shores of the Isle of Wight, range widely in colour, from brown and grey to pea green

ITALIAN OR FRENCH?

Wall lizards are widespread and common around the Mediterranean. If you've ever explored any ancient sun-baked ruins in southern Europe you may have seen several scuttling away into cracks in the stone as you approached.

Native only to Jersey in the British Isles, small colonies of these spectacularly green reptiles have been introduced to the mainland, and one of the best places to see them is around La Falaise, just to the west of Ventnor. The green wall lizards here are most likely descended from Italian stock. Those that originate from France are more likely to be brown.

Much larger than our native common lizards, they love basking in warm sunshine on south-facing rocks, so the stone walls of La Falaise car park offer an opportunity for guaranteed sightings of these fast-moving creatures.

Possibly introduced in Victorian times, maybe as early as 1841 by a Dr Martin, these lizards have now expanded their range westwards, but still largely within the confines of the coastal suburbs of Ventnor. Local folklore suggests they escaped from a wrecked Italian ship, but a planned introduction into local gardens by Victorian naturalists seems more likely.

SECRET COVE

Another highlight of this coastal walk is quirky and hidden-away Steephill Cove, a mix of old wooden beach shacks, upturned boats and crab pots, hugely reminiscent of the Caribbean. Stop at The Beach Shack or The Crab Shed for locally caught crab salad and a cold, refreshing Isle of Wight beer – just the job on a hot summer's day. The cove is not accessible by car and generally only discovered by those lucky enough to know about it.

The coastal path presses on to Woody Point below St Lawrence, where you can turn around and retrace your steps back to Ventnor, or alternatively, carry on to the village of Niton and catch the bus back.



Chris Gee is the author of *Walking the Yorkshire Coast: A Companion Guide.*

Photos Alamy

DAY OUT: Peel, Isle of Man

GIANTS OF THE IRISH SEA

The mosaic of marine habitats that surrounds the Isle of Man creates a home for some of the UK's most extraordinary wildlife, says **Daniel Graham**

We had been out at sea for two or three hours when the captain finally called it a day. "Sorry folks, we'll have to try again tomorrow." The rest of my family looked disappointed, but the incessant roll of the ocean had sent me into a state of nausea some time ago and the skipper's words were like a sea shanty to my ears.

As we sped back towards the village of Peel on the Isle of Man's western shoreline, the captain told of the veiled world that lay beneath us: soaring underwater cliffs cleft with deep, dark gullies; vast kelp forests anchored to the seabed with dragon-fist holdfasts; craterous rocky reefs; horse-mussel beds and meadows of lustrous seagrass. And with this, he continued, there is life; conger eels, starfish, lobsters, minke whales, dolphins, octopuses, porpoises and seals all thrive in these fertile waters.

MARINE MARVELS

The boat zipped on beneath wheeling seabirds too distant to identify. By now, the swell had subsided, and amid the calm we spotted the slate-grey body of a sunfish bathing on the surface a dozen or so metres from the boat. Every now and then its shark-like dorsal fin would appear at an angle, water gliding off it like scattered moonstones before dropping lazily back into the waves. *Mola mola* are the heaviest bony fish in the world; the largest ever recorded was as tall as a double-decker bus.

All of a sudden, another fin appeared, this time pyramidal and upright. "Basking shark!" the captain called, instantly cutting the engine. We sank into the slow beat of the sea and watched in silence as the shark veered our way. A few seconds later, almost upon the bow, the fin dropped beneath the surface and an enormous body materialised in the shadow of the boat. Mouth agape and gills billowing, it ghosted beneath us with one sweep of its sickle-shaped tail.

These zooplankton-feeding sharks can reach up to 12m in length and weigh over six tonnes. They're the second largest fish in the world, but to me that day, this unassuming giant felt like the largest thing that had ever lived.



Daniel Graham can't wait to get out to the coast and discover more marine wildlife.



Basking sharks can strain up to 2,000 tonnes of water per hour. Witness them in action on a Manx Sea Life Safari boat trip from Peel on the Isle of Man's west coast

Photo Getty



"RAZORBILLS, GUILLEMOTS AND STORM PETRELS ALL BREED ON LUNGA, BUT IT IS THE CLOWN-FACED PUFFINS THAT STEAL THE SHOW"

Photo: Alamy



The bill of the Atlantic puffin is serrated and hinged, an adaptation that allows the seabird to catch and hold dozens of sand eels at one time

DAY OUT: Lunga, Inner Hebrides

PUFFINS OF THE GREEN JEWEL

This small Inner Hebridean island is an off-the-beaten-track hotspot for one of our most adored seabirds, writes **Sian Lewis**

The remote Scottish island of Lunga has a population of zero – or thousands, depending on whether you are a human or a puffin.

This beautiful slice of the Inner Hebridean archipelago, described as "a green jewel in a peacock sea", has been deserted since the 1850s, but each summer it plays host to a huge colony of one of the most charming British birds of all: the Atlantic puffin.

SETTING SAIL

To reach Lunga, the largest of the Treshnish Isles, you must catch a boat from Oban on the Scottish mainland, or from the Isle of Mull. As you approach (most often on rolling, rocky seas), the "green jewel" appears temptingly on the horizon. Once off the boat and on to solid ground, you can walk up to the top of Harp Rock, where from May to August wild birds lay their eggs in burrows on the cliff edge or hidden in the rock face below.

Lunga is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated to protect the fragile breeding grounds of the puffins (classed as vulnerable) and 46 other bird species. Razorbills, guillemots, storm petrels and kittiwakes all breed on Lunga, but it is the clown-faced puffins that steal the show.

From April, the puffins arrive on Lunga to dig their burrows; each pair guards a single egg. After 40 days, the chicks hatch and the adults get busy feeding their young. They rush in and out of burrows, stalk about among the grass and the sea-pink flowers, or swoop low back to their broods with bills full of glittering silver sand eels. Lunga's puffins have little fear of humans, and if you stand or sit still to watch them, they will happily potter about very close to you – a dream for bird-lovers and wildlife photographers alike. In July or August, the chicks are ready to leave their burrows, and Lunga's puffin population returns to life at sea.

ISLAND EXPLORATION

If you can tear yourself away from the puffins, the rest of Lunga is a wonderful place to ramble, and small enough to walk around in an hour or so. All that remains of the hardy people who once eked out a living here are the ruins of a few black houses on the site of an old village to the north-east of the island; the rest is just craggy green cliffs surrounded by sparkling sea, and the growling call of the puffins.

In the summer, boats from Mull and Oban visit Lunga daily. Most day trips will leave you to roam around Lunga before continuing on to nearby Staffa.



Sian Lewis is a Bristol-based travel journalist, magazine editor and blogger.

Make it count
This summer, join Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count from 17 July to 9 August. Find out more at **bigbutterflycount.org**


1


2


3

TOP 10
BUTTERFLIES TO SPOT

Most of Britain's butterflies are on the wing over the summer months, so it's a great time to get to know them better, says **Adrienne Wyper**

1 BRIMSTONE *Gonepteryx rhamni*
Some say the word 'butter-fly' comes from Britain's only lemon-yellow species. Ranging widely in its long life (up to a year), it is often seen on scrubby grassland and verges, though rarely in Northern Ireland or Scotland.

2 HOLLY BLUE *Celastrina argiolus*
The first blue butterfly to emerge in early spring, this is found near holly and ivy, fluttering high above parks, churchyards, hedgerows and woodland, less often in northern England and Scotland.

3 COMMA *Polygonia c-album*
The underside of its orangey-brown, black-dotted, scalloped wings looks exactly like dead leaves so, unsurprisingly, the well-camouflaged comma thrives near wooded areas, particularly in England and Wales.

4 SPECKLED WOOD *Pararge aegeria*
Dappled with beige, these brown butterflies spiral upwards to chase each other. They feed on honeydew secreted by treetop aphids in lightly shaded woods, gardens and hedgerows, though rarely in northern England.

5 ORANGE-TIP *Anthocharis cardamines*
Only males have the eponymous orange tips to their white wings. See them in damp meadows, woodland glades, riverbanks and gardens, throughout the UK.

6 COMMON BLUE *Polyommatus icarus*
The most widespread blue butterfly has pale-blue wings (orange-spotted underneath) with a white border. It is found aross the UK in sheltered, sunny, grassy locations such as dunes, downs, verges and clearings.

7 PEACOCK *Aglais io*
Those multicoloured eyes on reddish wings, reminiscent of a peacock's tail, are designed to scare off predators. Often seen on buddleias in gardens, it is a strong flyer and ranges widely, preferring woodland borders.

8 MARBLED WHITE *Melanargia galathea*
Mottled black and white, this distinctive butterfly is fondest of purple flowers and grassland areas. It is rarely seen in mid and north Wales or north of Yorkshire.

9 RED ADMIRAL *Vanessa atalanta*
Originally 'red admirable', this lives everywhere from coasts to city centres, feeding on buddleias, ivy flowers and rotting fruit. Its black wings feature red bands and white splotches.

10 SMALL (COMMON) WHITE *Pieris rapae*
White-winged with one or two dark spots, this ubiquitous species is also known as the cabbage white, because it lays its eggs on the brassica family, thus is found in gardens, allotments and farmland.

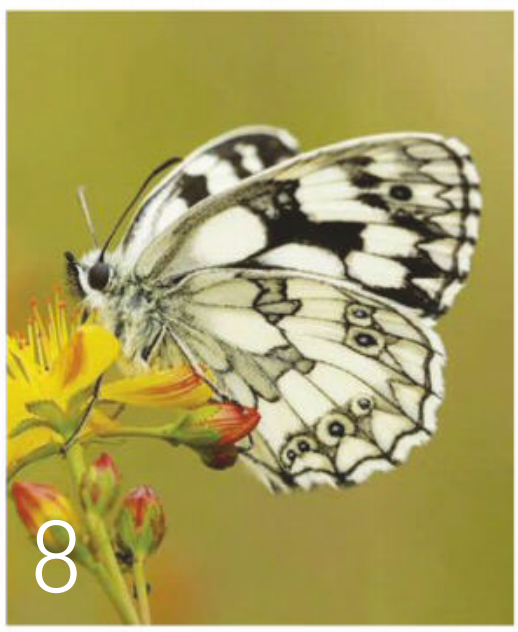
Photos: Getty, Picfair


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Lazy days

BOOKS › TV › PODCASTS › LETTERS › PUZZLES

Reviews editors: **Margaret Bartlett, Maria Hodson**

book of the month



Each year, Atlantic salmon return from the ocean and propel themselves up Scottish rivers to return to their breeding grounds

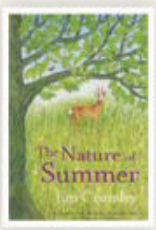
MEMORIES OF SCOTTISH SUMMERS

This reflective celebration of nature in the gentlest of seasons completes Crumley's series

BOOK

THE NATURE OF SUMMER

BY JIM CRUMLEY, SARABAND, £12.99 (HB)



An Atlantic salmon surges upstream like a torpedo, with bankside alders forming a "guard of honour". Midsummer sealsong ebbs and flows with the tides. That sudden splash in a flooded forest might be one of the beavers that have colonised the Trossachs. A St Kilda wren sings in a vast natural sea tunnel under the island of Hirta. Five northern brown argus butterflies settle on the digits of an outstretched hand.

Completing Jim Crumley's wonderful seasonal 'tetralogy', this absorbing and reflective book draws on his memories of 32 summers spent tramping Scotland's wild places, since he quit newspapers to become a full-time nature writer. And what memories!

Crumley has an easy, conversational style, confiding that he writes longhand with a fountain pen. Above all, he likes to be still in the landscape. Over and over, he returns to his favourite "perches" – a particular oak on a hillside, a rock at the head of a glen. His modus operandi is simple: sit, stare, listen. He talks with reverence about "nature letting me in a little more".

But in the most passionate chapter, Crumley lets rip. Why is climate chaos being allowed to wreak havoc on our planet, and make a mockery of the four meteorological seasons?

Crumley shares terrifying data on the scale of climate change: dying glaciers, droughts, wildfires in the Arctic. "Numbers," he says, "really are starting to scare the hell out of me."

Ben Hoare, author and naturalist

Photos: Getty, Dan Freeman

BOOK
NATIVE
BY PATRICK LAURIE, BIRLINN, £14.99 (HB)



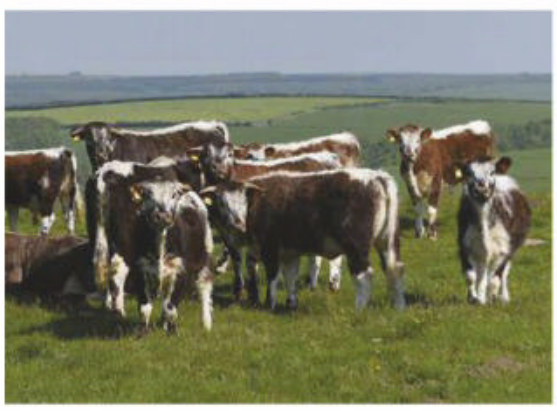
This book is a gem. A mud-splatted gem crafted by a writer besotted by birds, hairy cattle and farming where low clouds meet peat soil. Patrick Laurie, from south-west Scotland, and his wife, buy an old farm in land ravaged by Archibald the Grim centuries ago, but still alight with folklore, old meadows, yellowhammers, foxes and angst over tree planting. The contents reek of "cud and honesty".

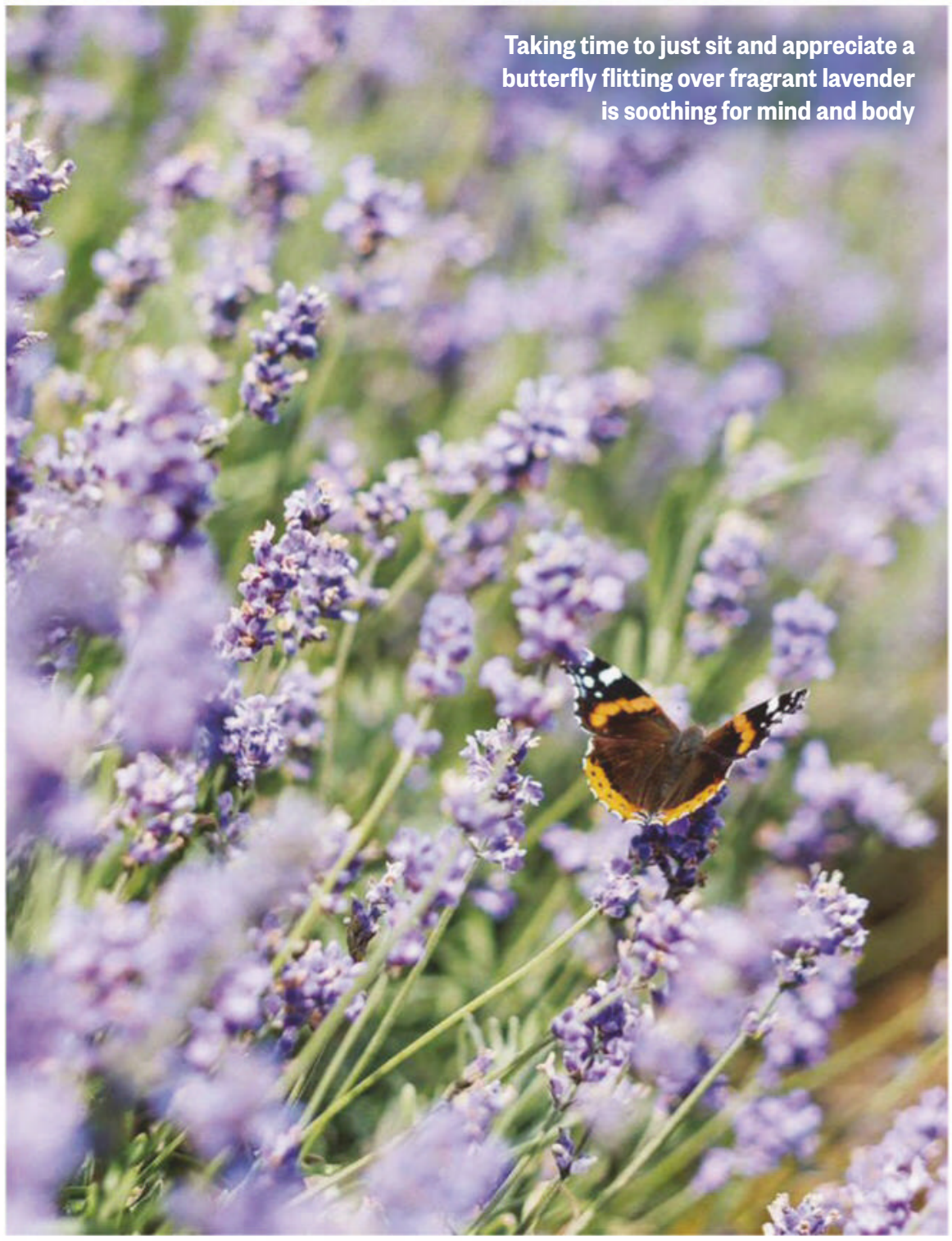
His journey, a very personal one, involves rejuvenating the farm with 'riggit' Galloway cattle, an unfashionable but perfectly suited hardy breed, in a "gritty, fearsome struggle" related with authentic candour. It is perhaps almost too hard at times, when he "beats black hell" with his scythe, or fiddles with ancient machinery as "sodden beasts make mirk with their heavy breath".

Laurie articulates the tensions, with refreshing humility, around bucolic farming as he releases native livestock on to moorland crying out for hoofs and dung in his quest to produce old-style fat-marbled beef. He soon discovers there's a "slim financial case for cattle in conservation" when butted up against modern "commercial" ways of silage efficiency, which erase both culture and wildlife that have "hooked an anchor on the earth".

Laurie is self-avowedly besotted with birds, with particular focus on his beloved curlews: "the last of a grand dynasty of hill birds which has crumbled into ash during the short course of my life". Buy this book. Then prepare to pay more for farming gems that nurture curlews.

Rob Yorke, rural commentator





Taking time to just sit and appreciate a butterfly flitting over fragrant lavender is soothing for mind and body

BOOK
THE NATURE REMEDY
BY FAITH DOUGLAS, HARPER COLLINS, £14.99 (HB)



Faith Douglas is a former mental-health worker whose life took an unexpected turn when she became curator at Thorp Perrow Arboretum in Bedale, North Yorkshire. She's also a shinrin yoku/forest bathing practitioner, showing others how to engage with the natural world. I don't know her, but this stunning book on how nature can improve our wellbeing, with gorgeous photography and lyrical line drawings, tells me that I'd like her a lot. And I suspect you will, too.

Right from the start, Faith tells us where she's at. She doesn't mince her words. "My work has convinced me of one fundamental truth: without nature we wouldn't survive, yet without us, nature would thrive." Yes! And... "We live in a time when life has never been more chaotic... A balance needs to be struck." Yes! And... "There is an instinctive knowing that runs in our cells... a feeling that we are born with that just knows nature is where we belong."

Although Faith will have written this prior to the Covid-19 crisis, her words couldn't be more fitting. We are witnesses to them, right now. Nature never went away; we just couldn't hear it above the sound of our own superiority complex.

What I love about Faith's book is that it's so personal. It's a love-letter to the planet and a literary charm-bracelet, featuring birds, octopuses, meditation, sky gazing, cloud lore, lunar gardening and more. Buy several copies and give them away.

Adele Nozedar, author and forager



BOOK

COASTAL SCOTLAND

BY STUART FISHER, BLOOMSBURY, £25 (PB)



Depending on how you measure it, the Scottish coast is between 10,000 and 18,000km long. The lengthier estimate is achieved by weaving around every bay, beach, inlet and islet – which is exactly what experienced sea-kayaker Stuart Fisher does in this comprehensive survey of the country's shoreline.

Fisher rigorously follows each inch of the map: from the Solway Firth (pictured) to the Borders beyond the Firth of Forth, via the fragmented fingers of land and rugged islands of the west coast, the wild waters around Cape Wrath to the very north and the sandier stretches and industrial ports along the east-side. On the way, he delves – in exhaustive detail – into the history, folklore, geology and wildlife of each area. I've been to Bloody Bay, near Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, but didn't know that it takes its name from a 15th-century sea battle or that the water is said to have stained the oystercatcher's beak and legs their scarlet red.

The frequent links to literature and accompanying illustrations – in the form of book covers, whisky labels and local stamps – colourfully complement the text, although the inclusion of a few full-page photographs would have been welcome. Floating somewhere between a coffee-table tome and a serious navigational guide, *Coastal Scotland* is a book for boaters, walkers and armchair explorers alike.

Pete Dommett, nature writer

PODCAST

BACK GARDEN BIOLOGY

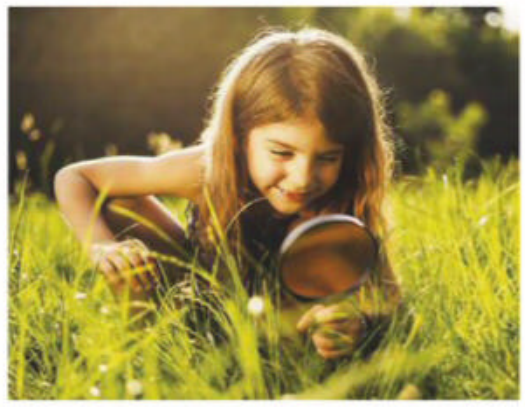
BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY

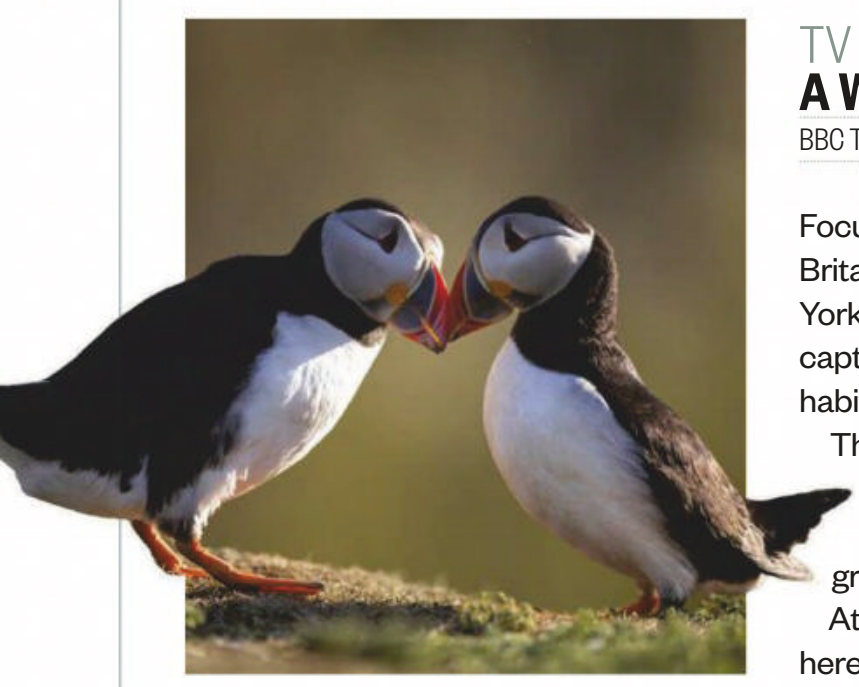
itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/id1504866863

In late March at the beginning of lockdown, Oxford University's Dr Lindsay Turnbull started recording – and filming – podcasts for her students from her own back garden. Far from being exclusive, this accessible series on the biology of garden wildlife is useful for all – even mini-beast-loving school children.

Over 11 episodes, Lindsay takes us on a journey exploring the everyday wonders around us, from a detailed look at how flowers reproduce, to bee-flys that are masters of deception and why cuckoo pint flowers have such a revolting stench. And did you know that just five insect groups dominate your garden? Learn how to identify 'The Bug Five' and tell them apart, with the help of beautiful drawings.

Packed with things to investigate right now, this is a fascinating biology masterclass from an expert.





TV

A WILD YEAR

BBC TWO, FRIDAY 3, 10, 17 JULY

Focusing on three distinct regions within Britain – the Pembrokeshire Coast, North York Moors and the Fens – *A Wild Year* captures the rhythm of these unique habitats over the four seasons.

The first episode focuses on the sea-spritzed coastline of Pembrokeshire, home to spectacular wildlife from grey seals to colourful puffins. The Atlantic ocean shapes the seasons here, in a region where farmers grow the earliest potatoes while sheep graze clifftop pastures.

Gorgeous cinematography depicts the landscape at close quarters and long range, using compelling time-lapse techniques. Puffins are caught courting by tapping their multicoloured bills together; red choughs use their long red beaks to probe for grubs on the pastures. As autumn arrives, the grey seals produce their white-coated pups before gales bring the might of the Atlantic bearing down on the shores.

Episode two portrays a year in the North York Moors, while the final episode focuses on the eastern coastal plains of the Fens.

Photos Getty



Matt Baker

THE *COUNTRYFILE* PRESENTER GOES BEHIND THE SCENES ON HIS SHOWS AND FAMILY FARM

DIY FILM-MAKING WITH THE BAKER FAMILY

Having left *The One Show* via a laptop on my ironing board, it quickly became clear filming during the pandemic was going to be challenging.

I've been very reluctant to leave home but passionate about keeping *Countryfile* on air. As a family, we offered to film an episode ourselves from home. Via a Zoom call, *Countryfile* sorted out all the kit and, a couple of days later, it was left in the front yard. It felt like a mixture of Christmas morning and an important exam. As well as presenting, directing and producing, I had to give the rest of the family a crash course in film-making. My son volunteered to be on camera one so he could spend more time off-screen than on. My daughter was a production assistant (complete with clipboard) while Nicola, my wife, was on camera two and sound, while also logging all the footage we recorded.

As a family, we learnt a lot about the intricacies of radio mics and the finer points of camera work.

"As a family, we learnt a lot about the intricacies of radio mics"



Matt finds the perfect vantage point for filming the garden – just don't step back!

Photo Oliver Edwards

A few early shots were ruined by a rogue microphone cable that kept dangling in front of the lens that wasn't noticed until we watched it back afterwards. My wife got some great shots of our next-door neighbour's peregrine falcon but hadn't realised the magnify button in the viewfinder was on, so what she captured was a lot further away than she thought and not quite as spectacular!

ACTION PACKED

It's always amazing what starts up when you shout "action", but this shoot was on another level. We had dogs barking, mowers starting up, tractors in the field. We lost an entire afternoon because of machinery working in the field behind us. We had a nightmare with the footage we shot as we couldn't view it on our computer. It took hours to sort it and even longer to upload.

The painting of the bee I did for the programme would normally have been relaxing for me, but having to think about getting all the shots that the team would need in the edit while trying to paint something that I had never painted before was far from calming! And filming a peregrine falcon in full flight was no easy feat either.

However, the hardest thing was actually building our pond while trying to film it. And after all the effort and everything that we shot, only a very small amount was shown. Footage is cut together to make the programme pacy, so a lot of material ends up on the cutting room floor. Despite this, we'd do it again in a heartbeat. That's why we still have all the kit sitting up in our spare room, looking like a forgotten store cupboard somewhere in the depths of the BBC's Natural History Unit.

Watch Matt on *Countryfile*, Sunday nights on BBC One.

Your countryside

HAVE YOUR SAY ON RURAL ISSUES

Share your views and opinions by writing to us at:
Have your say: *BBC Countryfile Magazine*, Eagle House, Colston Avenue, Bristol BS1 4ST; or email **editor@countryfile.com**, tweet us **@CountryfileMag** or via **Facebook www.facebook.com/countryfilemagazine**

*We reserve the right to edit correspondence.

NATURAL RECOVERY

As I sit in my garden at Easter reading through the April issue of *BBC Countryfile Magazine* and looking at the tantalising pictures of Snowdonia in Dixe Wills' article, 'Peak to Sparkling Sea', it's a reminder of what we are all going to miss this summer. Especially the picture of Beddgelert. Every year, with a group of friends, we spend a weekend in Beddgelert, enjoying walking or sightseeing for those not up to the challenge of a mountain peak. Sadly, it doesn't look like it will happen this year.

Perhaps, however, there is some good to come out of the terrible situation the world finds itself in at the moment. World leaders and scientists have been at loggerheads for years on the impact humans are having on the planet and so Mother Earth has wreaked her revenge on us and achieved what no world leader or scientist could do: stopped us all in our tracks. From the terrible bush fires in Australia to torrential rain and floods and now Covid-19, our planet has had her say.

Our national parks must be breathing a sigh of relief, as they are spared the onslaught of human feet to our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Perhaps this will allow those places time to recover and regenerate from the human traffic, especially the 'honeypot' sites. Those lucky enough to be living in those beautiful locations may actually be enjoying their environments without a steady stream of visitors for the first time in years.

It's too much to hope, I suppose, that we can learn from the severe kick up the backside our planet has given us and we actually learn to treat it with more respect than we are currently doing.
Chas Reading, Worcester

Editor Fergus Collins replies:
Those of us who love the countryside can only hope that our wildlife is going to have a booming year in our absence (though we must be vigilant to ensure footpaths are reopened once the lockdown is over). I'm also hoping, like you, that our green areas, rivers and woods will be better nurtured, respected and protected after this – not just by beneficent landowners and conservation charities, but by us all.



Areas such as Blea Tarn in Cumbria are enjoying a break from the crowds

THE PRIZE This star letter wins a fantastic **Berghaus Remote 28 rucksack**, worth £70. With plenty of storage, it has adjustable straps, a hip belt with zipped pocket, a walking pole holder and a ridge-moulded back with mesh to keep you cool on the trail. **berghaus.com**



ACCESSIBLE HOLIDAYS

My wife and I used to take many walking holidays and some were quite adventurous for seniors, doing B&Bs across France to Italy and back through Switzerland.

Unfortunately, due to illness and a hip operation, my wife now uses a mobility scooter and, of course, we are currently housebound. Watching mostly TV and not reading very much, I was pleased to be given a copy of your November 2018 issue that evoked many happy memories.

At some point we will want to get away again, but our choices seem somewhat limited now to something along the lines of a Yorkshire walking holiday. So, my question is, have you ever put together a suitable rambling weekend or holiday for a walker and a mobility scooter, with appropriate accommodation?

Bearing in mind that we are 84 and 80 respectively, maybe five miles per day maximum. If this is not an idea that is feasible, perhaps it might give rise to other holiday suggestions that we could consider.
Tony Spencer, via email





Kathy picks beetroot from the vegetable patch on her Somerset smallholding

Personal growth

“I very much enjoyed the article about Kathy and Tom (Somerset smallholders, April issue). It must be very hard work as they mentioned that they both also have full-time jobs. It was very interesting to read about the different fruit and veg they grow, as well as the livestock they keep. The photos were excellent, too. I suspect that people who grow their own food never go back to ‘bought’ food. My grandparents grew everything, so I know that there is no comparison between freshly picked beans and bought ones, for example.”

Stella Eames, via email

Editor Fergus Collins replies:
Thanks for this. I completely take your point and we strive to include accessible routes in the various travel articles and walks throughout the magazine but it would be worthwhile to run a larger feature once we’re through the worst of the lockdown.

MUSIC TO MY EARS

I just wanted to say how much I am enjoying your podcasts. I live just outside Abergavenny and know the places you are walking so can picture it exactly.

I’m walking the lanes by me at Llanddewi Rhydderch. And I have been counting wildflowers and learning bird songs. I’m looking forward to your dawn chorus one very much, it helps me learn them. While writing this, a blackbird (pictured) is singing away to me. I also just listened to your reading from Richard Jefferies’ *The Amateur Poacher* in episode three, season five of the podcast series. Very interesting.
Robby Tucker, Monmouthshire

Editor Fergus Collins replies:
Hi Robby – thank you! I know your village very well and almost bought a house there when I was first moving to Monmouthshire. The trick to learning birdsong is to keep at it. And if you can’t get out, I’ll do my best to help in the podcast.

Tune into the BBC Countryfile Magazine *plodcast at.*
countryfile.com/podcast



WALKS WITH WORDSWORTH

My wife and I are long-term subscribers of your truly excellent *BBC Countryfile Magazine*. This is the best magazine by far and depicts the best in the British countryside. We should like to commend all your contributors and also those who provide a number of interesting walks with detailed maps/extracts together with other activities. This is what makes the magazine so great. There is something for everyone’s enjoyment in our wonderful countryside.

Life members of the Ramblers Association and the RSPB, we are very keen on the outdoor life. This gives us a wide range of interests and curiosity about those places further afield.

At university, I studied English and creative writing. We covered Wordsworth and Coleridge and I discovered that they were both keen walkers. This fitted perfectly for my dissertation, entitled ‘Wordsworth and Coleridge: On Nature and Landscape in Their Time’. These poets spent days out walking together and then returned composing at either end of the large kitchen table at Alfoxsen, Wordsworth’s home.

I was absolutely thrilled and delighted to read Dr Sophie Coulombeau’s wonderful story about Wordsworth in the April edition of *BBC Countryfile Magazine*. This really made a special day for me.
Russell Falconer, Goring-by-Sea, West Sussex

CORRECTION: In our June issue, we included a walk around Dinas Head on the Pembrokeshire coast. Unfortunately, the wrong map was printed, which we would like to apologise for. To access the correct map and route, please visit: **countryfile.com/go-outdoors/walks/dinas-head-pembrokeshire/**

Photos: Getty, Alamy

Summer rain jackets for walkers

What's the best jacket for warm-weather walks, when summer squalls threaten? We went in search of the perfect garment – waterproof, breathable, lightweight and compact. Here's the verdict on our top seven for men and women

Words: **Joe Pontin**



JWP Shell, Jack Wolfskin, £120, jack-wolfskin.co.uk

This jacket has a simple and quietly stylish appearance. The hood has only a single adjustment, but while that often leads to a poor fit, this is one of the best-fitting I've tried. And it's fairly light at 400g.

But the story of this jacket is all about the fabric. Unlike many of the others on test, it's made from recycled polyester, without the use of harmful PFC chemicals. How does it perform technically? Both waterproofing and breathability ratings are high. It's stretchy to allow freedom of movement.

There are downsides, though. It's lined throughout with mesh. This keeps the skin away from the slippery inner surface of the fabric; but in effect adds an insulating layer. This and the lack of vents combine to make it a bit warm to wear on humid summer days. Pockets large enough for an OS map would be welcome, too.

VERDICT: Good-looking and technically sound, but gets sweaty in warm weather. 7/10



Element Stretch Jacket, Montane, £190, montane.co.uk

The waterproofing rating on this jacket by Northumberland-based Montane is pretty solid, if a little lower than some jackets on test.

But the big selling point of the Element Stretch is the extremely breathable fabric. On mild to warm days when showers threaten, warm air inside your jacket will escape through the fabric, keeping you relatively cool. But it's also great for colder days out doing more active pursuits, such as speed walking and cycling. The fit is slim, but the slightly stretchy fabric allows freedom of movement.

If there's a sudden squall, the hood is outstanding, with a good peak and a close fit around the face to keep out wind and rain.

The styling is pleasingly simple. There's no chest pocket, but a pair of hip pockets are just about big enough for an OS map – with a brief struggle. And the weight is pretty light at 405g.

VERDICT: Pleasant-to-wear fabric, great hood – all it lacks is vents. Great for speed walkers and active explorers. 8/10



Aysen jacket, Kathmandu, £190, kathmandu.co.uk

This is essentially a lightweight (400g) version of a top-spec hikers' jacket, so should suit serious day walkers in summer. The hood has an effective peak and a close fit around the face; the waist can be cinched to keep the fit close, and the low hem gives you extra coverage around the hips in exposed lcoations. The chest pockets are easily large enough for OS maps. With no hip pockets, a backpack harness fits comfortably.

Despite these excellent design features, you shouldn't expect the Gore-Tex Paclite Plus fabric to keep performing for hours in heavy rain. This is meant to be a back-up jacket to protect you from relatively short spells of wet weather. And backpackers note: the fabric is not intended to use with loads weighing more than 10kg – expect rain to soak through if you do.

Breathability should cope with most conditions: it may get muggy on uphill stretches when you are working harder – but there are big underarm vents to allow cool air in. (Speed walkers and cyclists might want something more breathable.)

VERDICT: An outstanding design for hiking with a daypack in unpredictable weather. 9/10



Deluge vented waterproof jacket, Berghaus, £120, berghaus.com
For a back-up waterproof during summer walks, this jacket offers a great balance of features. The waterproofing and breathability of Berghaus's own Hydroshell fabric are both solid, if a little lower than some on test. But in compensation it has an excellent hood, with a good peak and a close fit. Long underarm vents let in cool air when you overheat. Cuffs are adjustable, and the slightly dropped rear hem will suit cyclists. It's not the most stylish jacket in this test, but the price is very competitive for such a lot of useful features.
VERDICT: Great value for a back-up warm-weather waterproof that can cope with sharp showers. 8/10



Exposure 2, Mountain Hardwear, £315, mountainhardwear.eu
Made from Paclite Plus, created by US outdoor fabric-maker WL Gore for use in lightweight garments that will protect walkers during shortish spells of dodgy weather. The low weight (only 257g) will appeal to fans of ultralight walking, as will the simple chest pocket and two huge hip pockets big enough for OS maps.

For me, the big snag is the hood. It has a reasonably effective peak, but with only one cord to adjust, the collar is left open around the neck – so not ideally suited to driving rain or cold winds.
VERDICT: Lightweight, compact and waterproof – but the hood could be better. 7/10



Assar 2.5 jacket, Sherpa, £160, sherpaadventuregear.co.uk
This jacket has a lot going for it. It's compact and ultralight at only 180g – less than half the weight of most of the other jackets we tested. Comparing lab test results between different brands is problematic, but Sherpa claims impressive waterproofing and breathability ratings for its Himaltec fabric, and sure enough, it does feel noticeably airy even in warm weather, despite the lack of vents. But there is a major drawback – the hood is a disaster. The elasticated fit pulls the peak down flat over your forehead. This is not a good look, and does nothing to protect your eyes from rain.
Verdict: Ultralight, but the hood needs a rethink. 6/10



Torrentshell 3L Jacket, Patagonia, £150, eu.patagonia.com
Californian gear company Patagonia has a reputation for producing ruggedly stylish outdoor gear, and this is no exception, with its slightly retro good looks available in a range of modish colours. But the affordable price is another win: £150 is a competitive price for a durable, waterproof three-layer fabric (and look out for big discounts this summer). Underarm vents let cool air in when you warm up; the elasticated wrists would be improved with an adjustible fastener, but the hood is excellent. And the whole jacket packs neatly into its own zip-up pocket.
VERDICT: Rugged and good value. 7/10

Go online See more detailed reviews on our website: **countryfile.com/country-kit**

Country puzzles



This month's puzzles were kindly provided by Richardson Puzzles and Games. The new puzzle book range is out now and available to order via **www.richardsonpuzzlesandgames.com/books**

LETTER FIT

Fit all the words into the grid to complete the puzzle. Some words may initially fit in more than one place, but there is only one way to fit all the words together to complete the grid.

Three letters
Cow
Hay
Log

Four letters
Barn
Boat
Deer
Hill

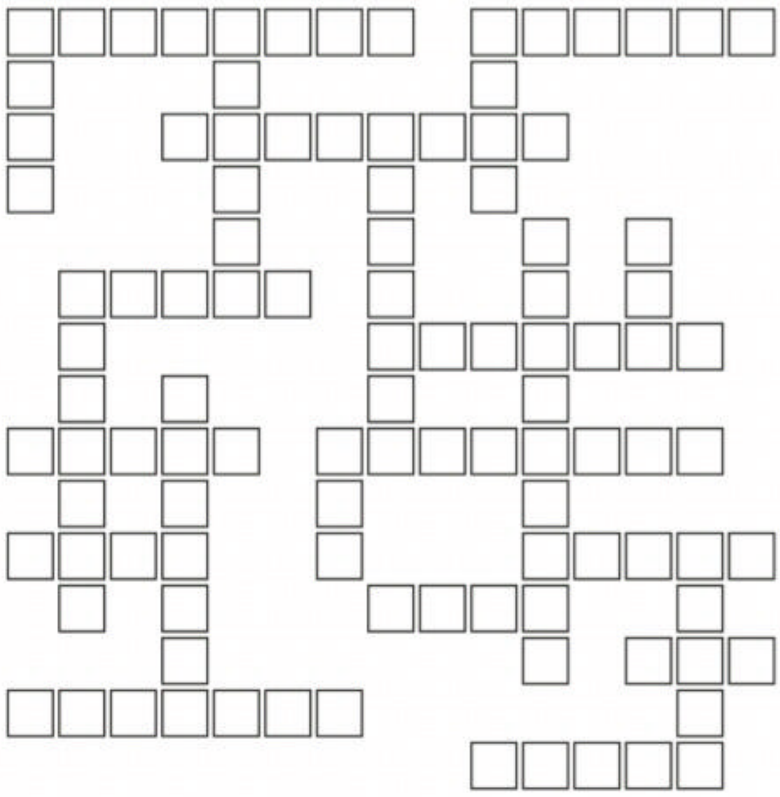
Five letters
Cloud
Fence
Field
Hiker
Horse

Six letters
Branch
Leaves

Seven letters
Berries
Bicycle
Cottage
Feather
Horizon

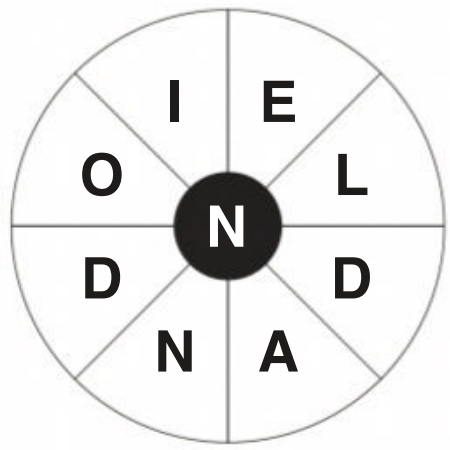
Eight letters
Duckling
Hedgerow
Ladybird

Nine letters
Butterfly



WORDWHEEL

Find as many words of three or more letters in the wheel as you can. Each word must use the central letter and a selection from the outer wheel; no letter may be used more times than it appears in the wheel. Can you find the nine-letter word hidden in the wheel?



CODEWORD

The numbers in the grid (1–26) correspond to the letters of the alphabet (A–Z) in some order. Solve the puzzle by cracking the code and discovering which number represents each letter. Three letters are provided to give you a start.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	20	19	12	24	■	18	1	15	1	16	3	14	24
2	14	■	1	■	5	■	24	■	24	■	24	■	12
3	18	3	24	21	14	17	24	■	9	1	4	11	11
4	11	■	17	■	7	■	14	■	18	■	14	■	23
5	23	14	14	■	17	■	24	■	18	14	25	19	17
6	24	■	■	■	14	23	24	3	14	■	14	■	1
7	17	■	10	■	25	■	■	■	17	■	20	■	23
8	25	■	1	■	5	1	22	14	25	■	■	■	14
9	1	8	3	25	14	■	3	■	19	■	1	2	11
10	17	■	13	■	19	■	24	■	15	■	20	■	3
11	19	15	19	23	2	■	19	17	1	7	19	15	24
12	6	■	17	■	4	■	11	■	7	■	14	■	7
13	14	26	14	15	17	19	23	2	■	16	3	1	9

Enter the letter in each circled cell in the order given below to reveal the themed answer.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
					V							

14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			T	M								

11M	9G	5A	1D	3K	11A	6F	6K

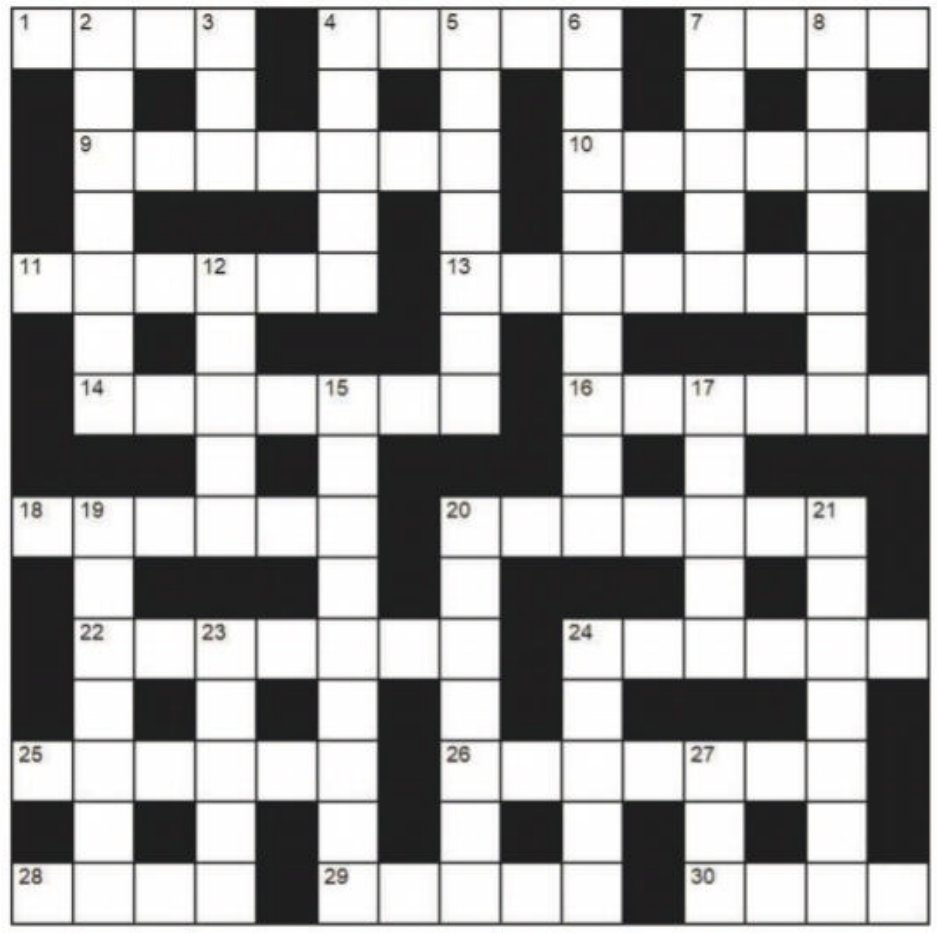
WORD PATH

Moving from letter to adjacent letter, can you create a continuous path that visits every square once and spells out all the words listed under the puzzle? Start on the shaded square.

D	U	P	R	E	M	R	A	F	T
D	I	E	P	I	S	H	B	B	I
L	S	S	M	N	G	E	A	R	N
E	I	C	A	D	A	E	P	D	E
N	A	D	O	P	T	D	S	R	A
E	S	E	L	E	A	N	T	T	G
P	T	G	I	P	L	D	R	S	E
O	I	D	C	N	O	O	E	O	R
N	R	B	T	I	W	M	A	F	W
D	F	O	O	C	M	E	A	D	O

Camping, daisies, farmer, footbridge, forest, garden, meadow, nest, picnic, pond, puddle, rabbit, sheep, stream, tadpole, woodland.

CROSSWORD by Eddie James



ACROSS

1/23 down Malus tree that bears small acidic fruit in autumn (4,5)
4 Welsh town on the Dee Estuary – and stone that's knapped (5)
7 Swap over ... rabbit's feet, say? (4)
9 Two of these birds seen together allegedly bring good luck (7)
10 Troublesome as gorse? (6)
11 Workplace where lots of dough is made! (6)
13 Borough on Thames Path National Trail ... associated with Clinton? (7)
14 Indications ... of what GPS devices need (7)
16 Pollen-producing part of a flower's stamen (6)
18 Made noise of plaintive puppy (6)
20 County Down village and castle – grey-brown percussion instrument (7)
22 Common name for blackberry shrub (7)
24/21 down Somerset peninsula wetland reserve – changing earth's streams (6,7)
25 Aquatic songbird, smallest of adult divers (6)
26 A barn owl's cry (7)
28 Land surrounded by water ... in Chislehurst (4)
29 Conceals birdwatchers' observation places (5)
30 See **3 down**

DOWN

2 Important wetland sites ... shown in diagram: 'Sarsens' (7)
3/30 across Common name for sphagnum (3,4)
4/7 Isle of Skye waterfall at Glen Brittle with turquoise waters – possibly pays for oil (5,5)
5 Water boatmen? Scent is dreadful! (7)
6 Where a parish kept its tenants' corny contributions? (5,4)
7 See **4 down**
8 Oxfordshire market town on Ridgeway Trail – a new tag fashioned (7)
12 Scottish market town – associated with Greek marbles? (5)
15 Suffolk resort famous for its music festival founded by Benjamin Britten (9)
17 Entire excavation reveals most westerly of the Inner Hebrides (5)
19 Small falcons' pastimes? (7)
20 As flies are prepared by game anglers (7)
21 See **24 across**
23 See **1 across**
24 In SSSI, resourcefully fathers a foal! (5)
27 Disease spread by beetle in 1970s almost wiped out this tree (3)

COUNTRYSIDE QUIZ by Maria Hodson

1. Which species of butterfly is only found in the Norfolk Broads?
☐a) Swallowtail
☐b) Black hairstreak
☐c) High brown fritillary
☐d) Large blue

2. Which pollinating garden plant is pictured below?
☐a) Grape hyacinth
☐b) Comfrey
☐c) Geranium
☐d) Foxglove



3. According to the *Book of St Albans* (1486), with which profession is the sparrowhawk associated?
☐a) Priest
☐b) Yeoman
☐c) Prince
☐d) Lady

4. When were Britain's railways nationalised?
☐a) 1934
☐b) 1948
☐c) 1963
☐d) 1968

5. The 1978 album *Avocet* features the songs 'Kittiwake' 'Bittern', 'Osprey' and 'Lapwing'. Who is it by?
☐a) Vashti Bunyan
☐b) John Renbourn
☐c) Richard Thompson
☐d) Bert Jansch

6. What is the name of naturalist Gilbert White's house in Selborne?
☐a) The Days
☐b) The Wakes
☐c)The Springs
☐d) The Sleeps

7. Which is the largest of the Treshnish Isles in the Inner Hebrides?
☐a) Lunga
☐b) Bac Mòr
☐c) Fladda
☐d) Cairn na Burgh Mòr

8. The scientific name for grey seals is *Halichoerus grypus* – what does this mean?
☐a) Earless ocean calf
☐b) Hook-nose sea pig
☐c) Shiny water lamb
☐d) Big-eyed swim horse



9. Which organ of the basking shark accounts for 25% of its weight?
☐a) Brain
☐b) Colon
☐c) Gills
☐d) Liver

10. The summer tradition of 'well dressing' or 'well flowering' takes place in which area?
☐a) Peak District
☐b) Exmoor
☐c) Brecon Beacons
☐d) Lake District

Turn to page 113 for all the answers

Next month

Don't miss your August issue, on sale 23 July



THE KINGDOM OF BUTTERFLIES

Delve into forgotten corners of Lancashire to find the natural paradise of Arnside and Silverdale AONB, where butterflies and birds thrive



WHITE CLIFFS LEGEND

How this chalk 'wall' on the south coast evolved as a unique wild habitat and a national symbol



MAGPIE MAGIC

One of Britain's most striking and exotic birds is also the source of many dark folklore tales



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Meet artist Kate Nicole whose delicate botanical paintings evoke her local countryside

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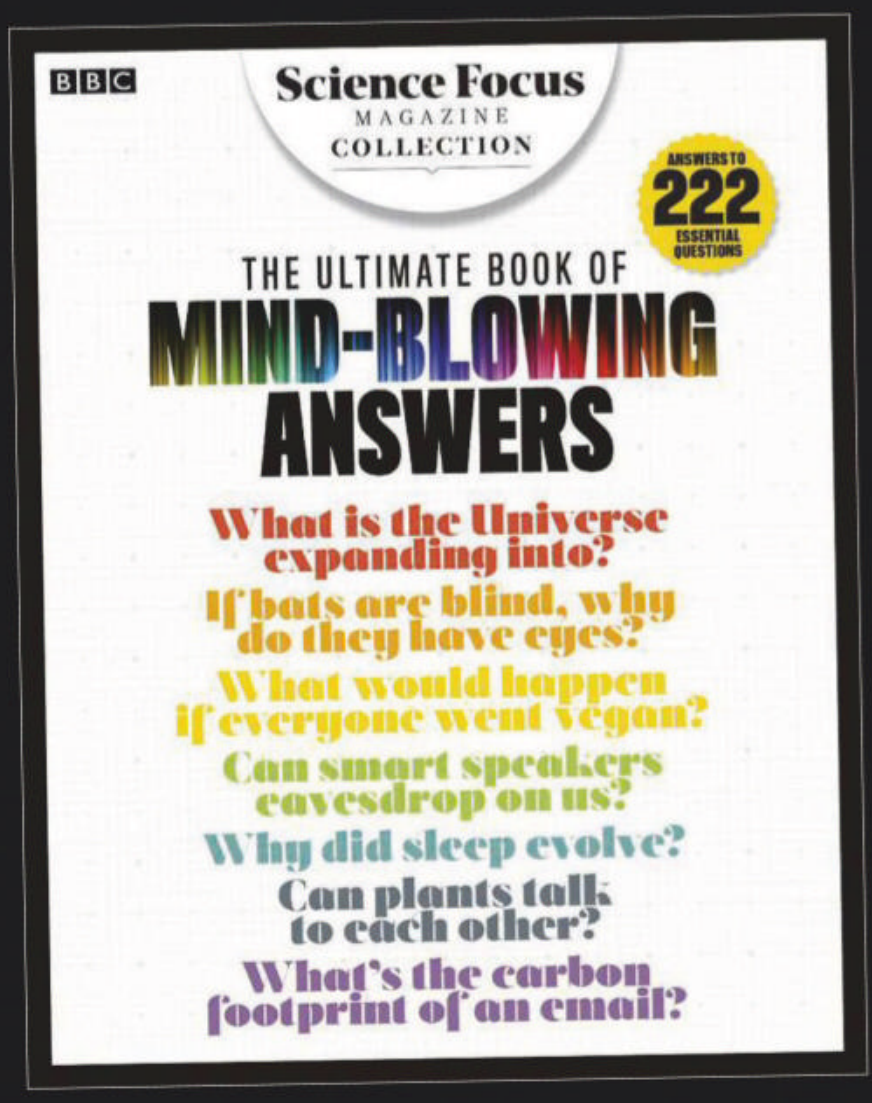
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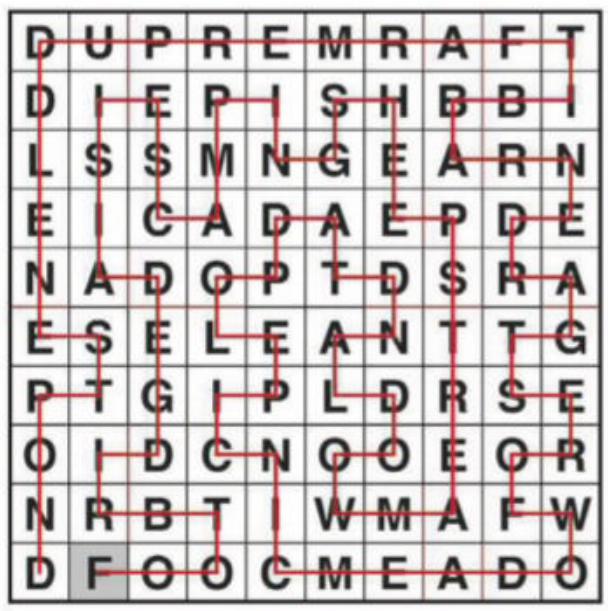
LETTER FIT



CODEWORD



WORD PATH



WORDWHEEL

Aeon, alien, alone, and, anion, annelid, anode, anon, dandelion, dean, den, denial, din, dine, dined, don, done, donned, elan, eland, end, eon, inane, inland, inn, ion, laden, lain, land, landed, lane, lean, lend, lien, linden, line, lined, linen, lino, lion, loan, loaned, loin, lone, nail, nailed, neon, nil, nine, nod, nodal, noddle, node, none, olden, one.

COUNTRYSIDE QUIZ

1 **a.** Swallowtail
2 **d.** Foxglove
3 **a.** Priest
4 **b.** 1948
5 **d.** Bert Jansch
6 **b.** The Wakes
7 **a.** Lunga
8 **b.** Hook-nose sea pig
9 **d.** Liver
10 **a.** Peak District

JULY CROSSWORD

JUNE ANSWERS

ACROSS: **7** Bulrushes
9 Yeast **10** Maize **11** Roach
13 Long Man **15** En route
17 Cherry-picking **22** Brushes
24 Herriot **26/28D** Red ruby
27 Trail **28/27D** River Tyne
29 Acorn **30** Nosebands

DOWN: **1** Albion **2** Mule
3 Es **4** Wych **5** Lambourn
6 Steered **7/12** Bumble bee
8 Heronry **14** March **16** Roker
18 Hound Tor **19** Inhales
20 Ebor Way **21** Storks
23 Shanny **25** Irvine



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Ellie Harrison on...

Country folk

The countryside is full of colourful tribes – do you recognise any of these rural characters?

We are all different. And yet, the human brain, adept at spotting patterns, begins to form visions of tribal groups, each with their own idiosyncrasies and habits. Here in the countryside, I've found a few...

THE FUND-FARMER

The conversation at parties is more interesting if James describes himself as a farmer – his "passion" – rather than a fund manager, which takes up most of his week in the City. Once the ornamental flock of mixed rare-breed sheep arrived – hand-picked by Sienna – along with the skittish collie, it was clear that it wasn't quite the hobby James had pictured, so a shepherd had to be added to the staff on his country-house books. The delightful 1,000 acres surrounding the house is really for Sienna's horseriding and the odd hay crop, so Dylan – who has moved especially from Wales to the Home Counties – now has the tricky job of befriending local farmers who'll help him out with the grazing. Thankfully, also on James' team is a besuited land agent who knows people at the livestock auction and has a knack of snapping up land the moment a farmer so much as touches his nose. Like that sweet arable farm on for £15m, which is now earmarked for James' four-year-old son. (He loves a ride on the John Deere Gator that one, a real farmer in the making.) Or the Old Boy who was talked into more age-appropriate accommodation so James could expand into his farmland. Terrible house, but lovely views. It does makes land somewhat prohibitive but, as James knows all too well, it's the market that always prevails. You see, it does help to have a bit of financial nouse in this business, after all?

There are the inheritance tax advantages, too, which means all this green empire building isn't quite as self-centred as it first appears: James' children will not know the hardships of his own childhood at grammar school. Back on the party scene, James' only fear is that eventually he may be introduced to a real farmer who'll begin bleating on about wheat prices or agri-environment schemes or whatever it is they actually talk about.



Watch Ellie on *Countryfile*, Sunday evenings on BBC One.

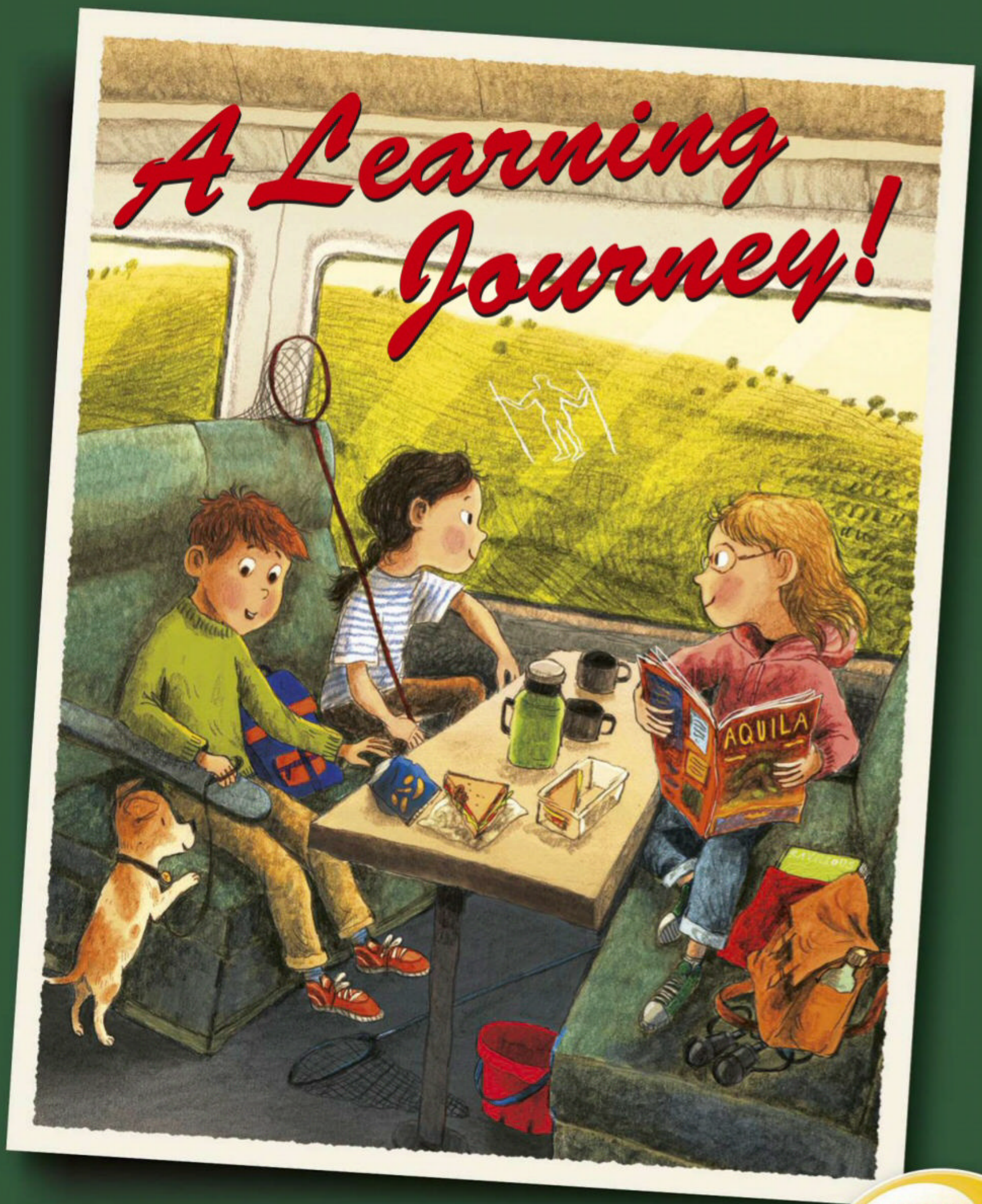
THE DFLS

Arabella and Jacob can't believe how much they can get for their money in the countryside after selling their two-bed flat in Fulham. It'll work out fine, as long as he's on the 5.45am to Paddington each morning. She jokes at the farmer's market that they are "DFLs" (Down From London) as she slides £2 into her jazzy-coloured Mulberry wallet, change from a tenner for a loaf of artisan bread. Still, all this access to local organic produce will represent a better life for the children. Admittedly, it gets slightly tiring driving the glass bottles to the organic dairy to refill with unpasteurised every few days, as does having to conjure up new recipes out of the relentless brassicas in the veg box, but Arabella could have booked a Tesco delivery slot in London and this is all about a fresh start.

They have, of course, now bought a dog, which the children love. It's terribly naughty and Arabella wonders if just one puppy class was enough training but she's sure it will settle down as it gets older. It's all part of country life, just like the badger cull she agreed to on her land as she's a firm believer in keeping these old country traditions alive. Aside from the now-barren night life, Arabella and the children are thriving. Poor Jacob, on the other hand, doesn't seem to be ageing at all well with his new life in the country.

• I'll be taking a look at more country clans in future columns.

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